



2017

Eagle River Assessment

Executive Summary Report

Destination Assessment

Eagle River, Wisconsin

February 2017

Wisconsin Department of Tourism
Strategic Mission

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism's mission is to market the state as the Midwest's premiere travel destination for fun. By executing industry-leading marketing programs, providing reliable travel information and establishing strategic partnerships, we will play a significant role in delivering exceptional customer service and generating greater economic impact and jobs for Wisconsin.

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Acknowledgements

The Eagle River Destination Assessment was conducted as a joint project between the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, Bureau of Industry & Agency Services, and the community of Eagle River. The project was coordinated by the Department of Tourism's Regional Tourism Specialist Jeff Anderson and the Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center.

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Eagle River Tourism Overview

Eagle River is a traditional resort destination set in the natural beauty of the Wisconsin Northwoods lakes and forests. The area's natural resources make possible a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities including boating, fishing, snowmobiling and bicycling. As a resort destination, Eagle River is home to traditional lodging properties, many of which are positioned on the shores of the World's Largest Chain of Freshwater Lakes, the 28 lake Eagle River – Three Lakes Chain. Eagle River has a diverse selection of businesses including restaurants, unique local retailers, attractions and lodging.

Eagle River offers a wide variety of experiences year round. As the Snowmobile Capital of the World, the community has a long standing reputation as a snowmobiling destination and host of the World Championship Snowmobile Derby. Eagle River is also the Hockey Capital of Wisconsin as the home of the Wisconsin Hockey Hall of Fame and host of the annual USA Hockey Adult Pond Hockey Championship.

2014 and 2015 Economic Impact of Tourism in Vilas County

Direct Visitor Spending		Total Business Sales		Employment		Total Labor Income		State & Local Taxes	
2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
\$207.7 M	\$212.3 M	\$264.3 M	\$271.5 M	1,963	1,967	\$38.5 M	\$40.5 M	\$21.4 M	\$21.7 M



Wild Eagle Lodge in Eagle River
Photo provided by TravelWisconsin.com

What Does Success Look Like Here?

To effectively plan the tourism development strategy, it is necessary to bring together the right people who can plan what activities, events or attractions will bring in visitors and cash flow. The outcome of such a process sets the stage for product growth and the platform for marketing plan development. It is important to answer the following questions:

- Who are your customers and what do they say is important to them?
- Do you have those assets and experiences or do you need to develop them?
- Is there a coordinated effort between your tourism and economic development programs?
- Are your stakeholders on board and do they understand the power of tourism and the contributions it makes to local and state economies?

Destination Assessment Process

Communities that believe they can compete for visitors should be commended for the vision to diversify their economies. In terms of job growth, the Travel and Tourism industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the new economy. And, these are jobs that can very rarely be exported outside the borders of the Badger State, much less the nation.

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism offers tourism partners a process designed to find the best path for maximizing strengths, appeal to visitors, and the development necessary to increase the impact of visitor spending on the local economy and grow jobs.

The process begins by engaging a municipality or an independent not-for-profit agency such as a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB), Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Council, Sports Commission or Arts Council. These entities have the resources to launch the process and the administrative ability to keep it on track.

1) Lead Organization/Municipality to Assign Task Force

The first step in the Destination Assessment Process is to assign a Task Force to take the lead in the deliberations that will ultimately establish a framework for enhanced Destination Marketing and Development.

The Task Force should have some individuals with hospitality-specific experience, but other stakeholders in the community are vital as well. The Task Force should be made up of hoteliers, restaurateurs, retailers and attractions...but also individuals from the Arts Community, Manufacturing, Agriculture, Finance, Healthcare, Media and Education. While every community is different, the optimum size for such a group is 13-20. This can be scaled back for very small destinations.

2) Task Force Gathers Perception Research Data

The Destination Assessment Task Force embarks on a fact-finding mission to thoroughly understand how the community perceives itself and what visitors think. This two-pronged approach affirms that there is a base from which an effective tourism strategy can be launched and that the community would be supportive of welcoming more visitors.

The Department staff guides the Task Force through available primary marketing research, existing economic impact research and how to perform perception research through intercept surveys and online vehicles.

Once the data has been gathered, the Task Force reconvenes to analyze the findings and develop a case that increasing visitation to the community could significantly enhance the local economy and job growth.

3) Perform a Comprehensive Inventory of Destination Assets

Probably the most important facet of a Destination Assessment is the compilation of a comprehensive inventory of assets. With a complete understanding of what the destination offers a visitor, the destination can maximize those assets and plan for development of the missing pieces.

The goal is to identify every asset that a visitor to the community could find interesting enough to visit or utilize.

4) Analyze all Research

Once all of the intelligence gathering has been completed by the Assessment Task Force, the analysis process begins and includes:

- Destination Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

In addition, the Task Force performs an analysis of its competitors. From the list of competitors, the Task Force then assess whether their community wins, losses or draws in head-to-head competition. As every destination has several aspects of appeal to visitors, the Task Force breaks the comparisons into several experiences.

5) Identification of Destination Vision

Once the community's compelling strengths have been identified and the research data analyzed, the Task Force identifies a Destination Vision to drive future initiatives. Short of developing a brand identity, this process establishes the goals toward which the destination will strive.

6) Identification and Prioritization of Potential Destination-enhancing Development Projects

With a Destination Vision established, the Task Force can begin to identify and prioritize the types of initiatives that will propel the destination forward in its desire to expand its visitor economy.

Eagle River Assessment Survey Summary

Two-hundred forty-two surveys were completed with 146 from visitors and 96 from residents. Visitors were intercepted while in Eagle River between January and November 2016. Resident surveys were completed in October and November 2016.

Visitors and residents agree that the area water resources, outdoor recreation opportunities, small town charm, natural beauty, forests, events, and businesses in and around the downtown are the community's most attractive assets and are the reason why visitors choose to visit Eagle River. Visitor responses also indicate that the reasons for their visit include staying with friends and family, second home or vacation home ownership, family tradition, and staying at a local resort. Nearly all visitors were on leisure trips with the exception of a group visiting for classes at the Advanced Welding Institute.

When asked what they see as the community's greatest weaknesses, more than half of visitors surveyed indicate that there are none or they are not able to identify any. Those who identify weaknesses primarily note limited business selection including these concerns:

- Limited Hours
- Inconsistent Hours
- Empty Store Fronts
- Few Open after 5:00pm
- Limited Variety of Restaurants and Unique Retail Shops

Residents more easily identify weaknesses which are mostly focused on the downtown including the need for:

- Improved Selection of Restaurants and Unique Retail Shops
- Additional Parking
- Public/Green Space
- Improved Aesthetics of Businesses and Public Spaces

In addition, residents see the need for additional things to do including:

- Nightlife
- Entertainment
- Non-Weather Dependent Activities
- For Youth
- Improved Cellular and Broadband Internet Coverage

Seasonality of the visitor economy including climate and snowfall are identified as a weakness by residents and a smaller number of visitors.

Residents overwhelmingly support efforts to consider new ways to attract visitors to Eagle River with 80 of the 96 people surveyed responding positively. These residents note the positive impact of visitor spending on the local economy, businesses and employment. Five of the residents surveyed are not supportive of new ways to attract visitors and five are uncertain if they are supportive. Notable concerns include crowding during the peak travel season, inability to maintain the area's small town charm while welcoming additional visitors, the negative impact of ATV/UTV trails due to environmental impact and noise, a desire to balance visitation across the county, the

belief that there is little that can be done by the community to impact travel to the area, and that the responsibility belongs to individual businesses.

Of the visitors surveyed, 76% were return visitors to Eagle River with the majority being travelers over the age of 45 residing in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. See Wisconsin Department of Tourism *Generational Travel: Boomers* report from March 2015 in Appendix A.

Resident Perception Surveys – 96 completed

If you did not live here, what about this community would encourage you to visit?

- Lakes and Rivers (53)¹
 - Boating
 - Fishing
 - Swimming
- Outdoor Recreation (35)
 - Snowmobiling (14)
 - Bike Trails (10)
 - Hunting (5)
 - Cross Country Skiing (3)
 - Hiking (4)
 - ATV/UTV Trails (3)
- Small Town Charm (32)
 - Friendliness of the People
 - Northwoods Atmosphere
 - Peaceful
 - Quite
- Natural Beauty (20)
 - Four Seasons
 - Scenery
- Forests (19)
 - National/State
- Events (14)
 - Craft Fairs
 - Cranberry Fest
 - Farmers Market
- Downtown (8)
 - Unique Shops
- Restaurants (6)
- Campgrounds (5)
- Creative Economy (3)
- Proximity to Target Markets (3)
- Resorts (3)
- Schools (3)
- Local Services (2)
- Not Much (2)
- Wildlife (2)
- Northwoods Children's Museum (1)
- Reasonable Prices (1)

¹ Quantity indicates frequency of response. When included for sub-categories, the quantity is also represented in the overarching category.

From a visitor's perspective, what are this community's most attractive assets?

- Lakes and Rivers (67)
 - Boating
 - Fishing
 - Cleanliness
- Outdoor Recreation (66)
 - Snowmobiling (15)
 - Bike Trails (14)
 - Hiking/Walking Trails (7)
 - Hunting (3)
 - ATV/UTV Trails (2)
 - Cross Country Skiing (2)
 - Golf (2)
 - Downhill Skiing in Upper Peninsula of Michigan (1)
- Small Town Charm (29)
 - Friendliness of the People
 - Peacefulness
 - Safe
- Events (21)
 - Craft Fairs/Cranberry Fest
 - Farmers Market
 - Fishing Tournaments
 - Journey's Marathon
 - U.S. Hockey Adult Pond Hockey Championship
 - World Championship Snowmobile Derby
- Forests (19)
- Natural Beauty (19)
 - Four Seasons
- Restaurants (12)
- Downtown (11)
 - Unique Shops
- Creative Economy (4)
- Campgrounds (4)
- Resorts (4)
- Wildlife (3)
- Proximity to Larger Cities (2)
- Tradition (2)
- Chamber of Commerce (1)
- Diversity (1)
- Easy to Get Around (1)
- Ice Castle (1)
- Lake Superior (1)
- Northwoods Children's Museum (1)

What are this community's greatest weaknesses in being able to attract visitors?

- **Downtown (24)**
 - Billboards not Visually Appealing
 - Need More Businesses
 - Need More Parking
 - Need More Public Spaces
 - Not Utilizing the Eagle River
 - Run Down Buildings
- **Shopping (24)**
 - Limited Business Hours/Limited Evening Hours
 - Need More Unique Product Offerings; Too Many T-shirt Shops
- **Activities (21)**
 - For Youth
 - Need Bigger Festivals/Events
 - Need More Indoor/Non-Weather Dependent
 - Need More Entertainment/Nightlife
- **Cellular Reception/Broadband (14)**
- **Restaurants (11)**
 - Need Options Other Than Bar Food/Supper Clubs
- **Climate (10)**
 - Insufficient Snow
 - Seasonality of Visitors
 - Too Cold in Winter
- **Access to Community (5)**
 - No Public Transportation/Airport
- **Lack of Marketing/Awareness (4)**
- **There are None (4)**
- **Customer Service Quality (4)**
 - Residents not Welcoming
- **Cost (3)**
- **Limited Workforce (3)**
- **Lodging Availability in the Summer (3)**
- **Complacent Community Members (2)**
- **Lack of ATV/UTV Trails (2)**
- **Lack of Business Cooperation (2)**
- **Average Hotels and Expensive Resorts (1)**
- **Competition from Minocqua (1)**
- **Crowding in Summer (1)**
- **Hiking Trails not Marked (1)**
- **Nothing Can be Done; Visitation is Out of Our Control (1)**
- **Police (1)**
- **Poor Signage at City Entrances (1)**
- **Too Much Emphasis on Fishing/Snowmobiling; Not Enough on Biking/Hiking (1)**

What addition to the community would make it more attractive to visitors?

- **Improved Downtown (33)**
 - Additional/Uniform Business Hours
 - Clean Up
 - Consistent Business Facades
 - Green Space
 - More Parking
 - More Variety of Unique Shops
 - Wall Street as a Pedestrian Mall
- **More Viable Local Businesses (11)**
 - Exciting
 - Non-Tourism Dependent
 - Unique Retail Shops
- **Restaurant Variety (11)**
 - Ethnic
 - In Addition to Taverns/Supper Clubs
 - Outdoor
 - Waterfront
- **Nothing/Not Sure (10)**
- **More Non-Weather Dependent Activities (9)**
 - Indoor Waterpark (6)
- **More Variety of Events (8)**
 - Sporting Events
- **Improved Cellular Service/Broadband (6)**
- **More Activities for Youth/Families (6)**
 - Community Activities
 - Youth Center
 - Zoo
- **ATV/UTV Trails (4)**
- **Additional Advertising (3)**
 - In Southern Wisconsin/Midwest
 - Not Just Events
- **Enhance Natural Beauty of Community (3)**
 - Less Open Space/More Trees
- **Improved Customer Service (3)**
- **Big Box Store/Shopping Mall (2)**
- **More Dog Friendly/Dog Park (2)**
- **More Entertainment/Nightlife (2)**
- **More Hiking/Biking Trails (2)**
- **Trail Connectivity**
- **More Winter Recreation Activities/Events (2)**
- **Agritourism Experiences (1)**
- **Better Streets (1)**

- Event Center (1)
- More Resorts (1)
- Native American Center (1)
- Public Transportation (1)
- Utilize Waterfront (1)
- Welcome Signage at Community Entrances (1)
- Worker Housing (1)

Knowing what you do about the economic impact of additional visitors to your community, do you support efforts to consider new ways to attract them to town...and why or why not?

- Yes (80)
 - Economic Vitality (35)
 - Will Help Local Businesses (13)
 - Jobs (11)
 - Quality of Life/More Options for Residents (5)
 - Visitors Become Permanent Residents (4)
 - But Concerned about Additional Demands on Volunteer Base (2)
 - Especially in Spring, Fall and Winter (2)
 - But Concerned about Crowding for Residents (1)
 - But not Commercialized (1)
- Maybe (5)
- No (5)

If you answered “no”, what is your biggest concern regarding additional visitors?

- Too Crowded for Residents/Parking (3)
- Can't Welcome More and Maintain Small Town Charm/Safety (2)
- Concerned about Negative Impact of ATV/UTV Traffic on Trails and Noise (2)
- It is the Responsibility of Individual Businesses (1)
- Needs to be Balanced Across County (1)
- We Can't Impact Willingness to Visit (1)

Visitor Perception Surveys – 146 completed

What city, state, zip are you from?

- Milwaukee Area (37)
- Illinois (23)
- Madison Area (15)
- Michigan (9)
 - Upper Peninsula (5)
- Wausau (9)
- Northwoods (8)
- Minnesota (6)
- Appleton/Fox Cities Area (4)
- Eau Claire (1)
- Iowa (1)
- La Crosse (1)

Male or Female

- Female (93)²
- Male (68)

Age

- Up to 15 (1)³
- 16-20 (11)
- 21-44 (22)
- 45-60 (52)
- 61 and Over (77)

What about this community encouraged you to visit today?

- Visiting Family/Friends (17)
- Lakes and Rivers (14)
 - Boating
 - Fishing
- Small Town Charm (13)
 - Friendly People
 - Northwoods Experience
 - Peacefulness
 - Quiet
 - Restful
 - Safe
- Events (12)
 - Cranberry Fest

² Total responses are greater than total surveys completed due to instances where travel companions completed a single survey.

³ Ibid

- Farmers Market
 - Northwoods Art Tour
 - World Championship Snowmobile Derby
- Advanced Welding Institute (12)
- Leisure Trip (10)
- Natural Beauty (10)
- Second Home/Vacation Property (10)
- Wild Eagle Lodge (7)
- Family Tradition/Vacation (6)
- Forests (6)
- Unique Shops (6)
- Outdoor Recreation (6)
 - Biking
 - Bird Watching
 - Canoeing
 - Hiking
 - Hunting
- Local Services/Shopping (4)
- Recommended by Family/Friend (4)
- Restaurants (3)
- Advertising (3)
 - Looked Nice Online
- Camping (3)
- Staying in a Nearby Community (3)
- Cranberry Tour (2)
- Love it Here! (2)
- Wildlife (2)
- Curious About Area (1)
- Grew Up Here (1)
- Learning About the Local History (1)
- Movie Theater (1)
- Snowmobiling (1)
- Steamboat Meet (1)
- Wedding (1)
- Wild Rice (1)

Have you visited the community before?

- Yes (115)
- No (36)

From your perspective, what are this community's most attractive assets?

- Lakes and Rivers (51)
- Small Town Charm (44)
 - Community Pride
 - Friendliness of the People
 - Local History
 - Peaceful
 - Quaintness
 - Quiet
 - Relaxed
- Natural Beauty (29)
 - Scenery
- Forests (24)
- Outdoor Recreation (19)
 - ATV/UTV Trails
 - Biking
 - Cross Country Skiing
 - Fishing
 - Hiking
 - Horseback Riding
 - Kayaking
 - Snowmobiling
 - Snowshoeing
 - Swimming
- Attractions (12)
 - Brewery
 - Museums
- Unique Shops (18)
- Restaurants (11)
- Events (11)
 - Farmers Market
 - World Championship Snowmobile Derby
- Wildlife (3)
- Advanced Welding Institute (2)
- Camping (2)
- Cleanliness of the Area (2)
- Downtown (2)
- Ease of Access (2)
- Local Services (2)
- Lodging (2)
- Affordability (1)
- Local Businesses (1)

What are this community's greatest weaknesses in your eyes?

- Nothing/Don't Know (80)⁴
- Business Selection (27)
 - Empty Store Fronts
 - Inconsistent Hours
 - Nothing Open after 5:00
 - Restaurants
 - Shops
- Road Conditions (5)
- Downtown Looks Old/Blighted (4)
- Lack of Entertainment/Attractions (4)
- Crowded at Times (4)
- Cellular Service/Broadband (3)
- Customer Service Inconsistency (2)
- Signage (2)
- Too Small (2)
- Distance from Home (1)
- Lack of ATV/UTV Trails (1)

What addition to this community would make it more likely that you'll return?

- Nothing/Don't Know/Like it the Way it is (89)
- Entertainment/Attractions (8)
 - Boat Tours
- Waterfront/Outdoor Dining (6)
- Single Track Bike Trails/Trail Connectivity (4)
- Additional Shops (3)
 - Quality
 - Unique
- Department Store (3)
- More Events (3)
- More Consistent Snow (3)
- Walking Trail Along the River (2)
- ATV/UTV Trails (1)

⁴ Author makes the assumption that 'Nothing', 'Don't Know' and 'Like it the Way it is' are similar perceptions.

First Impressions Program

In addition to direct visitor and resident research completed for this Destination Assessment, in the summer of 2015, Eagle River participated in UW Extension's First Impressions program which helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of the first time visitor. Through the program, volunteers from two similar communities agree to do unannounced visits of each other's community. Eagle River partnered with Hayward who sent six community members to visit Eagle River. The following is a brief summary of the visitor perceptions from the visiting community. The full report is available by contacting the Vilas County UW Extension office.

Prior to their visit, the Hayward contingent researched Eagle River. The information services they received prior to the visit were found to be very helpful and friendly. Websites visited had a positive appearance but at times were difficult to navigate. Social media accounts were available but not updated regularly.

In their first 10 minutes, the Hayward contingent found Eagle River to be a "very appealing, small tourism area with resorts, camping, fishing and snowmobiling." They also noted that the community was very busy, welcoming and had a positive visual appearance.

The overall perception of the downtown was that it was "small but nice." The area was "appealing and pleasant" and they noted the diversity of local businesses including restaurants and retailers. Storefronts had a welcoming appearance and the general design of the downtown streetscape was positive including the benches and red brick crosswalks and the streets were clean and accessible.

The contingent noted that the Visitor Center was difficult to find, some businesses did not list their hours, there were many help wanted signs and some business signs were hidden by trees. Some members noted that they were unable to find a shady spot to sit on a hot sunny day.

Tourism was identified as the primary industry by the contingent offering many recreational activities such as bike paths and ATV trails. On the day of their visit there were a lot of people biking. Events were noted as a significant draw for visitors including Paul Bunyan Fest and the World Championship Snowmobile Derby.

The Hayward contingent identified events as the experience that would bring them back to Eagle River.

Graded Areas

- Community Entrances – B
- Downtown or Central Business District – B
- Retail – B
- Tourism – A
- Housing – B
- Business and Economy – B
- Education, Health, Social and Emergency Services – B
- Government, Infrastructure and Land Use – B
- Recreation, Faith and Culture – B

Lasting Impressions/Challenges

- Inconsistent Hours of Operation for Retail Stores
- Underutilized Storefronts
- Not Much to do After 5pm
- Labor Market
- Awkward Bathroom Placement in Visitor Center
- No Public Transportation

Destination Asset Inventory

Local= Drawing local residents

Regional= Day trips; people coming short distances from around the area

Destination=Drawing overnight visitors

Cultural & Heritage Attractions	Description	Local	Regional	Destinational
Buildings of Architectural Interest	Eagle River Recreation Association - Ice Arena	X	X	X
Historical Tours	Chain Of Lakes Property and Boathouses, Twisted History Tours	X	X	X
Interpretive Centers	Trees for Tomorrow	X	X	X
Historic Districts	Downtown - Walking Tour Brochure	X	X	
Early Settlements	White Spruce Inn Cabin	X	X	
Landmarks	Eagle River Recreation Association - Ice Arena, T-docks, White Spruce Inn, Crystal Spring Boathouse, Everett Resort, Railroad Depot	X	X	
Memorials and Monuments	Veterans Memorial at Courthouse	X	X	
Museums	Eagle River Historical Society, Wisconsin Hockey Hall of Fame, Northwoods Children's Museum, World Headquarters Snowmobile Museum	X	X	
Walking Tours	Downtown Walking Tour, Twisted History Tours	X	X	
Religious Sites and Facilities	Eagle River Cemetary, Churches	X		

Nature-Based Attractions	Description	Local	Regional	Destinational
Arboretum/Botanical Gardens	Trees For Tomorrow	X	X	X
ATV Trails/Routes	Routes	X	X	X
Bird Watching	National, State and County Forests	X	X	X
Fall Foliage	National, State and County Forests	X	X	X
Forests (State/National)	Chequamegon Nicolet National Forest, Northern Highland - American Legion State Forest	X	X	X
Environmental Programming	Trees For Tomorrow	X	X	X
Lakes	Chain of 28 Lakes, 1300+ Lakes in Vilas County	X	X	X
Rivers, Streams and Waterways	Wisconsin River, Eagle River, Deerskin River	X	X	X
Wilderness Areas	Blackjack Wilderness Area	X	X	X
Woodlands	National, State and County Forests	X	X	X
Beaches	Torch Lake, Eagle Park, Silver Lake, Anvil Lake, Hunter Lake	X	X	
Islands	Scattering Rice Lake, Cranberry Lake	X	X	
Nature Trails	National, State and County, Three Eagle Trail	X	X	
Star Gazing Sites	Lakes, Eagle Lake Park, Silver Lake Park, T-docks	X	X	

Recreation	Description	Local	Regional	Destinational
Ball Parks/Tournaments	Odenburg Park, Hockey Arena	X	X	X
Bicycling	Three Eagle Trail, County Roads	X	X	X
Bird Watching	National, State and County Forests, Three Eagle Trail, T-docks	X	X	X
Camping	National, State, County, Hi-Pines, Forest Pond, Chain of Lakes Campgrounds	X	X	X
Canoeing	Deerskin River, Wisconsin River, 1300+ Area Lakes	X	X	X
Fishing - Fly	Deerskin River, Wisconsin River, 1300+ Area Lakes	X	X	X
Fishing - Ice	1300+ Area Lakes	X	X	X
Fishing Derbies/Tournaments	Musky Open, Spring Classic, Pauls Pro Am, Professional Musky Tournament Trail	X	X	X
Hunting	National, State and County Forests	X	X	X
Marathons/Tri-athalons	Journeys Marathon, Sausage Fest 5K, Color Run 5K, Zombie Run 5K, Three Eagle Trail Half Marathon, Moonlight Run 5K	X	X	X
Snow Skiing - Cross-Country	Nordmarka Trail, Anvil Lake Trail, Three Eagle Trail	X	X	X
Snowmobiling	600+ Miles Groomed by Sno-Eagles Snowmobile Club	X	X	X
Amusement or Theme Park	Rocking W Stable with Kartway	X	X	
Beaches	Anvil Lake, Silver Lake, Hunter Lake, Eagle Park, Torch Lake	X	X	
Boat Rides	Pirates Hideaway, Bill Hassey Boat Tours, Boathouse Tours on the Chain of Lakes	X	X	
Geo-Caching	Various Geo-Catches Locations	X	X	
Golf	Eagle River Golf Course, Lake Forest Golf Course	X	X	
Hiking/Walking	National, State and County Forest, Three Eagle Trail	X	X	
Horseback Riding	County Trails, Pine Point Riding Stables, Pine Ridge Sunshine Ranch, Rocking W, Great Northern Adventure	X	X	
Jet-Skiing	1300+ Area Lakes	X	X	
Marinas	Eagle River Marina, Boat S'Port	X	X	
Picnicing	Eagle Park, Riverview Park, Silver Lake, Dyer Park	X	X	
Regattas and Boat Races	Callie Rohrs Canoe/Kayak Race	X	X	
Roller Blading	Skate Park at City Hall	X	X	
Running	Everywhere	X	X	
Sledding	Eagle River Golf Course, Lake Forest Golf Course	X	X	
Swimming	Hunter Lake, Silver Lake, Eagle Park, Torch Lake, 1300+ Area Lakes	X	X	
Tennis/Pickle Ball	Vilas County Fairgrounds, Riverview Park, Northland Pines High School	X	X	
Water Skiing	1300+ Area Lakes	X	X	

Special Events	Description	Local	Regional	Destinational
Arts, Crafts and Hoppy Fairs	Memorial Day, Labor Day, Paul Bunyan Fest, Cranberry Fest, Artarama, Up North Beerfest	X	X	X
Auto/Motorcycle/Snowmobile/ATV Racing	Eagle River Speedway, World Championship Snowmobile Derby, ATV/UTV Derby	X	X	X
Fishing Derbies	Musky Open, Paul's Pro Am, Spring Classic, Professional Musky Tournament Trail, Guides Kids Day	X	X	X
Harvest Celebrations	Cranberry Fest	X	X	X
Pageants	Miss Wisconsin		X	X
Sports Events	Journeys, Hockey, Sports Camps	X	X	X
Agricultural Fairs	Vilas County Fair	X	X	
Air Show	Props and Pistons	X	X	
Antique Auto Show	Classic Car Show	X	X	
Antique and Collectibles Show	Rotary Antique Show, Cranberry Fest	X	X	
Boat Shows	Upper Mississippi Steamboat Meet	X	X	
Dance and Opera Productions	Silver Blades Ice Show, Daceworks Recital	X	X	
Environmental Festivals	Forest Fest	X	X	
Farm Tours	Lake Nakomis Cranberry	X	X	
Farmers' Market	Eagle River - Wednesday and Sunday	X	X	
Flower Shows	Garden Walk	X	X	
Golf Tournaments	Several	X	X	
Holiday Celebrations and Festivals	Christmas Kick-Off, Hallowfest, 4th of July	X	X	
Horse Shows	Hunter Jumper Show	X	X	
Local Theatre	Headwaters Performing Arts, Northland Pines High School	X	X	
Livestock Exhibitions	Vilas County Fair	X	X	
Music Festivals and Concerts	Vacationland Voices, Prince of Peace Singer Alive	X	X	
Parades	4th of July	X	X	
Symphony/Orchestral Performances	Headwaters Performing Arts, Northland Pines High School	X		
Tractor Pulls	Vilas County Fair	X		

Other Attractions	Description	Local	Regional	Destinational
Artisan Colonies	The Warehouse, Eye of the Entrepreneur, Northwoods Art Tour, Artarams	X	X	X
Convention/Conference Facility	Derby Track, Eagle River Inn, Chanticleer, Eagle Waters, Wild Eagle, Riverstone, Northwoods Center	X	X	X
Retreats and Learning Centers	Lotto Log Cabin, Trees for Tomorrow, Northwoods Children's Museum, The Warehouse, The Blank Canvas, Big Mess Studio	X	X	X
Biggest/Smallest	World's Largest Chain of Freshwater Lakes	X	X	X
Antiquing	6 Stores Downtown	x	X	
Bed & Breakfasts	Inn at Pinewood	X	X	
Culinary Offerings/Local Foods and Wines	Tribute Brewing Company	X	X	
Movie/TV Locations	Vilas Cinema 5	X	X	
Scenic Highways	County K State Designated Rustic Road	X	X	
Shopping and Retail Experiences	Downtown Area	X	X	
U-Pick Farms/Orchards	Clearwater Farms	X	X	
Wineries/Breweries and Tasting Rooms	Tribute Brewing Company	X	X	
Ziplining	Kartway	X	X	
Murals/Outdoor Art	Eagle River Mural, Eagle at Depot, Indian Rock	X		
Railroad Depots/Rides	Eagle River Railroad Depot Museum	X		
Skating/Skateboard Parks	Located Behind City Hall	X		
Unusual Buildings	Eagle River Recreation Association - Ice Arena	X		

Access	Description
Airport	Eagle River Union Airport
Highways	State Highways 45, 70, 32, 17
Rental Car Agencies	Eagle River Union Airport
Lodging	Description
Hotels	7 (319 Rooms)
Motels	5 (83 Rooms)
Lodges/Cabins	17 (299 Rooms)
Condos	4 (269 Rooms)
Bed and Breakfasts	1 (8 Rooms)
Private Homes	42 (147 Rooms)
Private Campgrounds	3 (353 Sites)
State and National Park Camping	5 (190 Sites)
Dining	Description
Restaurants -Local Cuisine	12
Fast Food and Chains	6
Brew Pubs/Craft Breweries	N/A
Taverns and Bars	14
Supper Clubs	10
Home Town Hangouts	2
Coffee Shops	2
Shopping and Service	Description
Grocery Stores	2
Specialty Stores	31
Drug Stores	2
Clothing	7
Supply	2
Dry Cleaners	1
Laundromats	1
Sporting Goods	9
Auto Repair	12
Service Stations	6
Hospitals/Healthcare	3
Banks	8
Sports Facilities	4
Meeting and Convention Facilities	7

Top Eagle River Assets

1. Chain of Lakes
2. Outdoor Recreation
3. Northwoods Resorts
4. Events
5. Attractions
6. Restaurants
7. Retail Shops
8. Small Town Atmosphere

Target Market Overview: Win, Lose, Draw

This is an exercise to analyze how the destination fares against target markets by reflecting on the assets as being better, the same or inferior.

Target Market: Milwaukee/Chicago/Madison			
Top Assets	Win	Lose	Draw
Chain of Lakes	X		
Outdoor Recreation	X		
Northwoods Resorts	X		
Events		X	
Attractions		X	
Restaurants		X	
Retail Shops		X	
Small Town Atmosphere	X		

Competitive Overview: Win, Lose, Draw

This is an exercise to analyze how the destination fares against the competition by reflecting on the assets as being better, the same or inferior.

Competitive Destination: Hayward

Top Assets	Win	Lose	Draw
Chain of Lakes	X		
Outdoor Recreation			X
Northwoods Resorts	X		
Events	X		
Attractions	X		
Restaurants			X
Retail Shops		X	
Small Town Atmosphere	X		

Competitive Destination: Minocqua

Top Assets	Win	Lose	Draw
Chain of Lakes			X
Outdoor Recreation			X
Northwoods Resorts			X
Events	X		
Attractions		X	
Restaurants			X
Retail Shops		X	
Small Town Atmosphere	X		

Competitive Destination: Door County

Top Assets	Win	Lose	Draw
Chain of Lakes	X		
Outdoor Recreation	X		
Northwoods Resorts		X	
Events			X
Attractions			X
Restaurants		X	
Retail Shops		X	
Small Town Atmosphere			X

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

Strengths

Friendly Business Owners/Residents
Chain of Lakes
Natural Beauty
Events
Snowmobile Trails
Bike Trails
Hiking Trails
Ski Trails
Resorts
Public Safety
Supper Clubs
School District
Grocery Stores
Children's Museum
Ice Castle
Snow
Fishing
Seasonal Activities
Fall Color
History
Collaboration of Community Entities
Volunteer Fire Department
Police Department
Volunteer Base
Fourth of July Parade
Hunting Opportunities
Retail Shops

Threats

Weather
Power Outages Outside the City of Eagle River Due to Service Limitations
Cellular Outages Due to Service Limitations
Workforce Challenges
Outmigration Young People
Generational Trends Relating to Life/Work Balance and Volunteerism
National and State Economic Factors

Weaknesses

Cellular Service and Broadband Internet Access
Aging Population of Business Owners
Appealing to a Younger Demographic
Workforce
Dependence on Weather
Seasonal Business Climate
US and State Highway System
Lack of Public Transportation to Eagle River
Limited Public Transportation
Lack of Alternative Transportation Development Coordination (Bike/ATV Routes)
No Fat Tire Biking Opportunities
Aging Buildings
Inconsistent Store Hours
Stores Closing in Shoulder Seasons
Unwelcoming Business Owners
Customer Service
Youth Activities
Selection of Restaurants and Hours
Lack of Evening Entertainment

Opportunities

ATV Trails
Fat Tire Biking
Utilizing Knowledge/Skills of Resident Retirees
Attraction of Younger Demographic as Visitors and Residents
Economic Growth
Access to Cellular Service/Broadband Internet
Unify Downtown through Collaboration
Arts and Cultural Experiences
Revitalizing Downtown Business Facades
Utilization of the Eagle River; Connecting to Downtown
Growing Corporate Meetings/Retreat Market
Artist Residencies
Small Business Center/Remote Worksite
Library Remodeling
Variety of Businesses Downtown
Outdoor Dining Downtown

Eagle River Development Opportunities

Opportunities	Ranking by Priority/ Importance	Easy, Medium, Difficult to Achieve	Timeline (Years) 0-2, 3-5, 6+	Who Owns It?
Unify Downtown through Collaborative Efforts	1	D	0-2	ERRP, Eagle River Business Association, City of Eagle River, Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center, Business Owners
Bike Trail Connectivity	1	D	3-5	Vilas County, Townships around Eagle River, City of Eagle River, Great Headwaters Trail
Access to Cellular Service/Broadband Internet	1	D	3-5	City of Eagle River, Vilas County, Vilas County Economic Development Corporation
Attract Younger Demographic as Visitors & Residents	1	D	3-5	City of Eagle River, Northland Pines School District, Private Businesses, Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center
Utilize the Eagle River/ Connection to Downtown	2	M	0-2	ERRP, Eagle River Business Association, City of Eagle River, Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center
Outdoor Dining Downtown	2	M	0-2	ERRP, Eagle River Business Association, City of Eagle River, Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center, Business Owners
Utilize Knowledge/Skills of Resident Retirees for Volunteer Base	2	M	0-2	Civic and Business Organizations
Arts & Cultural Experiences (Artist Residency)	2	M	0-2	The Warehouse Four Seasons Center for the Arts
Additional Business Variety Downtown	2	D	3-5	ERRP, Eagle River Business Association, City of Eagle River, Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center, Business Owners

Consistency of Business Façade Design	2	D	6+	ERRP, Wisconsin Main Street Program, Eagle River Business Association, Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center, City of Eagle River, Business Owners
Small Business Center/Remote Worksite	3	E	0-2	Eagle River Economic Development Corporation, Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center, Private Businesses
Fat Tire Biking	3	M	0-2	Vilas County, Townships around Eagle River, City of Eagle River, Special Interest Groups
ATV Riding Opportunities/Trail Development	3	D	6+	Vilas County, Townships around Eagle River, City of Eagle River, Special Interest Groups
Growing Corporate Meetings/Retreat Market	4	D	3-5	Private Businesses, Eagle River Area Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center

Destination Vision Summary

What is a destination? A destination is essentially the ending point for any trip. There are as many different kinds of destinations as there are people who visit them. The important point is that you know who you are and the destination assets that appeal to your visitors and potential visitors. The challenge is determining what about Eagle River differentiates it from the competition.

Here is what the Task Force thinks the ideal visitor destination and community looks like:

The ideal destination is one that offers a balance of outdoor recreation activities with a variety of family friendly dining, shopping and entertainment experiences. The walkable downtown embodies the community's sense of place. Businesses work collaboratively offering unique products and friendly service in a unified setting. Clean and well-kept businesses and public spaces complement the area's natural beauty. The destination provides opportunities for rest and relaxation while still providing access to the conveniences of home.

Here is what the Task Force thinks Eagle River will look like because of authentic tourism growth:

By 2022, Eagle River stakeholders are collaborating to build on key assets while pursuing new opportunities to expand the visitor experience. The downtown is a friendly and walkable business district with a diverse selection of dining, shopping and entertainment opportunities which serve as the center of visitor activities in the destination. With the support of the community, recreational trails have been expanded in and around Eagle River. Community volunteerism is strong creating opportunities for retirees to become involved sharing their talents and resources. Access to broadband internet and cellular service is increasing. Visitor experiences introduce Eagle River as a great place to live and work drawing the interest of new residents, including young families. Eagle River delivers on its reputation as a premier Northwoods destination.

Recommendations

Eagle River is a premier resort destination in Wisconsin's Northwoods. The destination's top assets, including the Chain of Lakes, recreational trails, Northwoods resorts and events, continue to be the lures that draw visitors to Eagle River as confirmed by the perception research completed with this Destination Assessment. The purpose of this Destination Assessment for Eagle River was not an attempt to reinvent the destination, but rather to evaluate current visitor and resident perceptions and to discuss opportunities that may exist to continue to benefit from the economic impact of visitor spending on the community.

Based on the research and discussion completed through the Destination Assessment process, the following are recommendations for the community of Eagle River.

1) **Develop a "First Impressions" program to help promote a thriving downtown**

A strong component of the area's development vision should focus on continuous improvement of the downtown area; the business climate, the number of and variety of business and retail opportunities. The heartbeat of small towns is found in its people and in the vitality of its downtown. Eagle River's current downtown is healthy and an attraction for visitors; however, research indicates opportunities for improvement. Keep in mind, if the locals don't want to hang out downtown, likely neither will visitors.

- Buildings painted and tidy
- Appealing welcome and directional signage placed appropriately
- Landscaping and flowers placed appropriately throughout the downtown
- Debris and unwanted eye sores removed

Focus on the 10-10-10 "rule of critical mass"⁵. According to Roger Brooks, in just three lineal blocks, you must have a minimum of ten places that serve food. Examples include a soda fountain, bistro, café, bakery, coffee shop or restaurant to name a few. The second ten are destination retail specialty shops and might include art galleries, wine shops, book or antique stores. And finally, ten places open after 6:00 p.m.

2) **Invest in additional research to guide recreational trail development**

Approach recreational trail development efforts through visitor based research. Perception research for this Destination Assessment Report indicates that both motorized and non-motorized recreational trails are a lure for visitors to Eagle River. Trail infrastructure is a significant longterm investment for a destination and expansion opportunities can be severely limited by user group and land use conflicts. In order to develop and pursue a successful longterm trail use plan, a more detailed understanding of visitor trends and perceptions will be necessary.

3) **Continue to leverage regional collaborations**

The ability for Eagle River to succeed as a visitor destination is directly influenced by its relationship with regional partners in Vilas and Oneida Counties. Communities in the region share a variety of key assets including recreational trail systems, lodging, dining and retail. Establishing or continuing mutually beneficial relationships between these communities will allow each to offer its visitors a stronger tourism product.

⁵ Destination Development Inc. Amazing Facts About Downtowns, June 2, 2011

- The Rule of Four⁶ – A visitor needs four hours of activity for each hour that they travel. Collaborating to promote key assets within the region will strength the appeal of the area to visitors in existing target markets and provide an opportunity to draw visitors from new markets or those which are a greater distance from the region.

4) Focus on delivering exeptional customer service

Delivering exceptional customer service is imperative for every business and especially for hospitality businesses where the product is the experience delivered by each and every employee. Engage business owners in the importance of creating great customer service experiences and continue to utilize the Wisconsin Department of Tourism customer service program as a tool in this effort.

- Hold two annual community based customer service seminars, one in the spring and one in the fall, leading up to busy summer and winter travel seasons.
- Identify businesses with a significant number of hospitality based staff members and offer in house customer service seminars.

5) Continue to pursue development of expanded celluar service and broadband internet

The outdoor recreational experiences afforded by the quiet charm and natural beauty of Wisconsin's Northwoods continues to be the primary travel motivator to Eagle River as supported by perception research completed for this Destination Assessment. However, while travel and tourism industry trends indicate that visitors seek a destination to escape the stresses of their everyday lives, they still desire the ability to stay connected. Expanded access to cellular service and broadband internet has the opportunity to encourage more frequent visits and extended stays.

⁶ Ibid

GENERATIONAL TRAVEL: BOOMERS



MARCH 2015

BACKGROUND

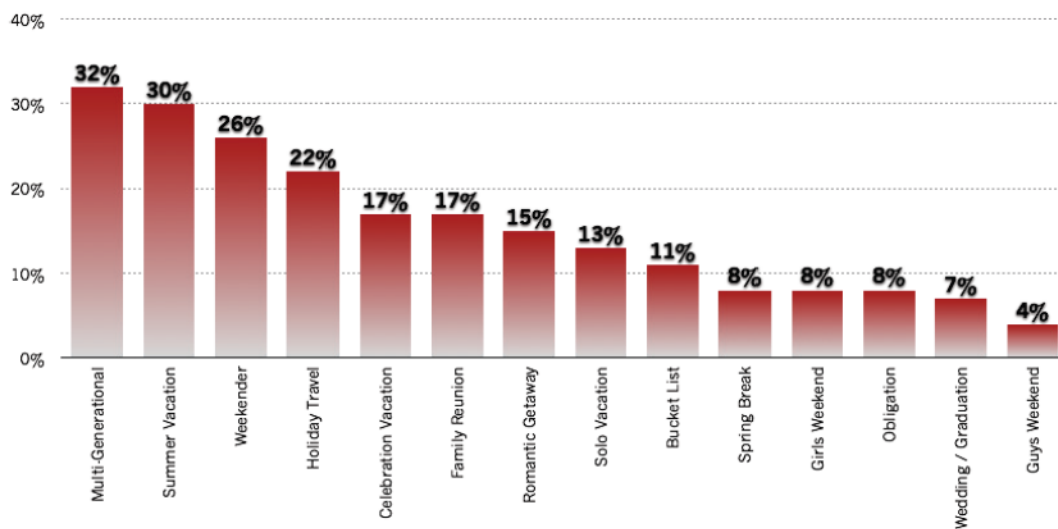
In order to keep track of trends in travel and tourism – and the factors that drive those trends – we have begun to create periodic reports that outline noteworthy updates to the industry. Armed with this knowledge, the Department and its Industry Partners may find opportunities to connect with potential travelers in more meaningful ways.

In this installment of these reports, we look at travel habits and motivations of a specific group of travelers: Baby Boomers. For the past several months, AARP has published a number of research studies regarding this group's travel habits. The following provides a summary of some of the most actionable insights from this research.

For the purposes of their study, AARP defined Boomers as 50 years old or older. All statistics shown below represent this group. For further detail on Boomer travel, the studies in their entirety can be found [here](#).

WHY TRAVEL?

In its research, AARP presented respondents with a number of different “trip types” to choose from when describing their domestic travel plans for 2015. Not surprisingly, Multi-generational travel tops the list. This insight speaks to the importance of traveling with family among Baby Boomers. For this group, traveling is a time to not only create experiences, but to share those experiences with family.



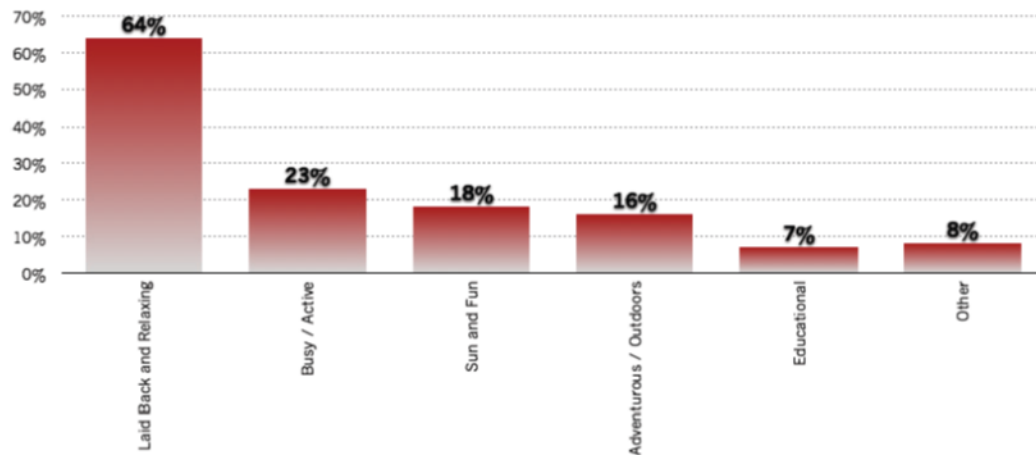
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GENERATIONAL
TRAVEL:
BOOMERS



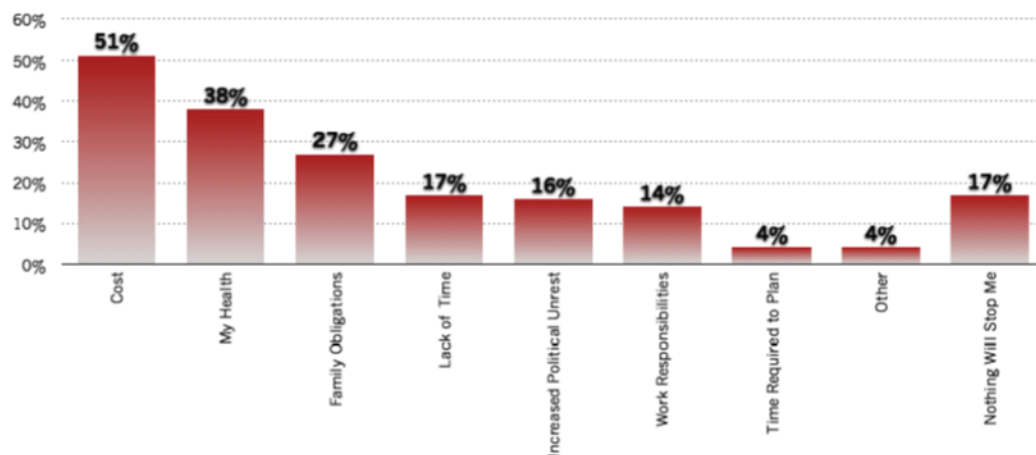
JANUARY 2015

AARP also asked Boomers what their ideal vacation would consist of. Among domestic travel, “Laid Back and Relaxing” is by far the leading type of vacation cited. As we think about how to bring “Fun” to life in our advertising and marketing, this will be something to consider when speaking specifically to the Boomer crowd.



WHY NOT TRAVEL?

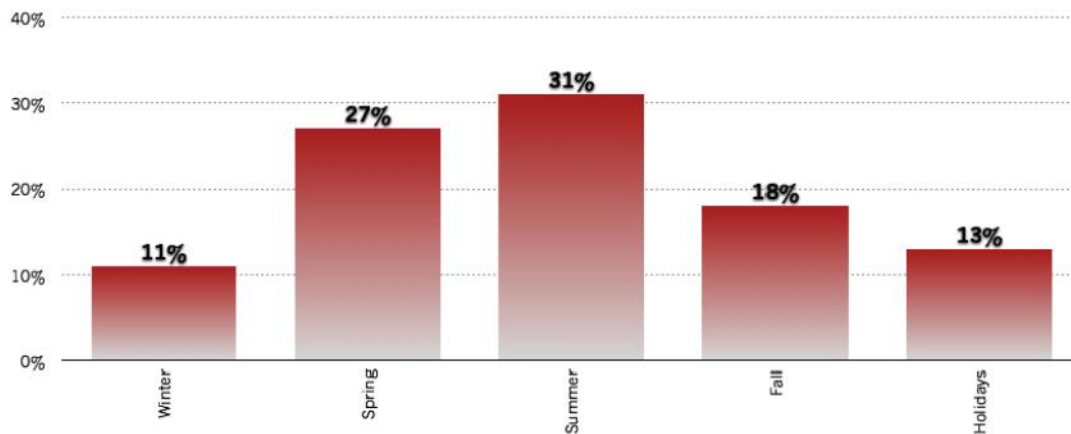
So we know why Boomers travel. But what stops them from potentially traveling? Cost is cited as the number one barrier. However, we know from our proprietary Tracking Study that Midwest travelers view Wisconsin as being the best value for a vacation when compared to Illinois, Michigan, and Minnesota. Knowing this, it will be important to stress the value of traveling to / within Wisconsin when talking directly to the Boomer generation.



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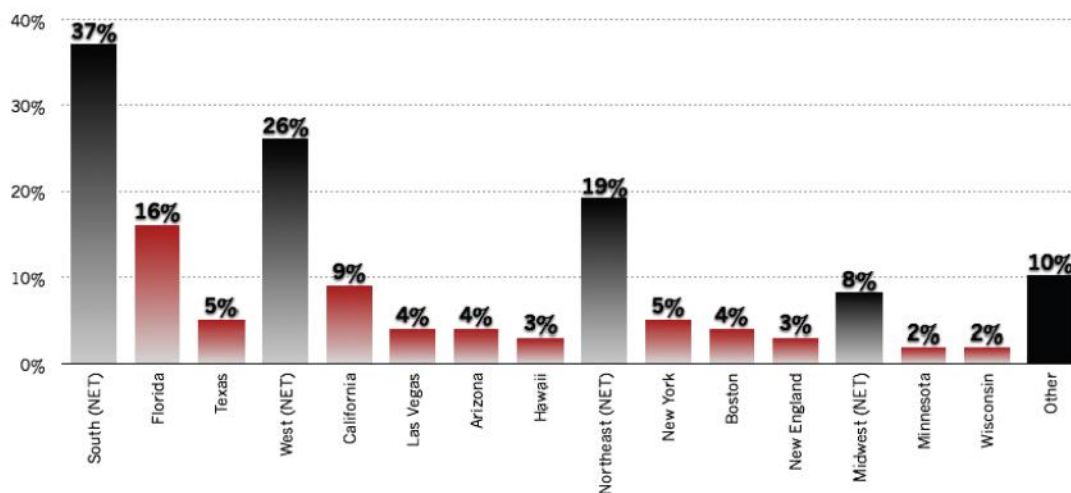
WHEN TRAVEL?

Similar to the findings from our Tracking Study, spring and summer are seen as the most popular travel seasons. Our media strategy lines up perfectly with this finding, as we spend the majority of our budget leading up to the summer months. One interesting new finding from AARP is the prevalence of “Holiday” travel. 13% of Boomers polled cited Holiday travel as their reason for traveling in the past.



WHERE TRAVEL?

Similar to our findings from the state's proprietary Tracking Study, warm states (Florida, Texas, California, Arizona, Hawaii) are seen as the most attractive destinations among Boomers. However, it is worth noting that Wisconsin is seen as an attractive destination by about two percent of respondents.



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