

**VISITOR CHARACTERISTICS OF TRAIL SYSTEM USERS
IN CEDAR FALLS/ WATERLOO**

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine characteristics of trail users at George Wyth State Park and Cedar Valley Trails. Socio-demographic characteristics and motivations of the visitors will provide valuable information to be used by the Waterloo and Cedar Falls tourism offices for future promotion of the trails.

Methodology

The study of visitors to Cedar Falls and Waterloo utilized both mail and intercept surveys. In regards to the mail survey, sample for the study was randomly selected from individuals who had recently requested information from either the Waterloo or Cedar Falls tourism offices. Secondly, a number of visitors were intercepted at twenty-four different locations, including sporting events, theatre, community festivals, museums, and outdoor recreation areas.

This study focuses on the trail users at George Wyth State Park and the Cedar Valley Trails. In total, 39 completed surveys were obtained. Almost two-thirds of respondents were intercepted on the Cedar Valley Trails (n=27), while nearly one-third was intercepted at George Wyth State Park (n=12). The following are some of the trail users characteristics.

Study Findings

A. Socio-Demographic Characteristics

59.5% of study respondents were male (n=22), and 40.5% were female (n=15). In regards to the age, the two main groups of visitors were 10 to 19 years old (31.7%) and 60 to 69 years old (25.2%). In other words, the majority of trail users were families with children. The age distribution is shown in Figure 1.

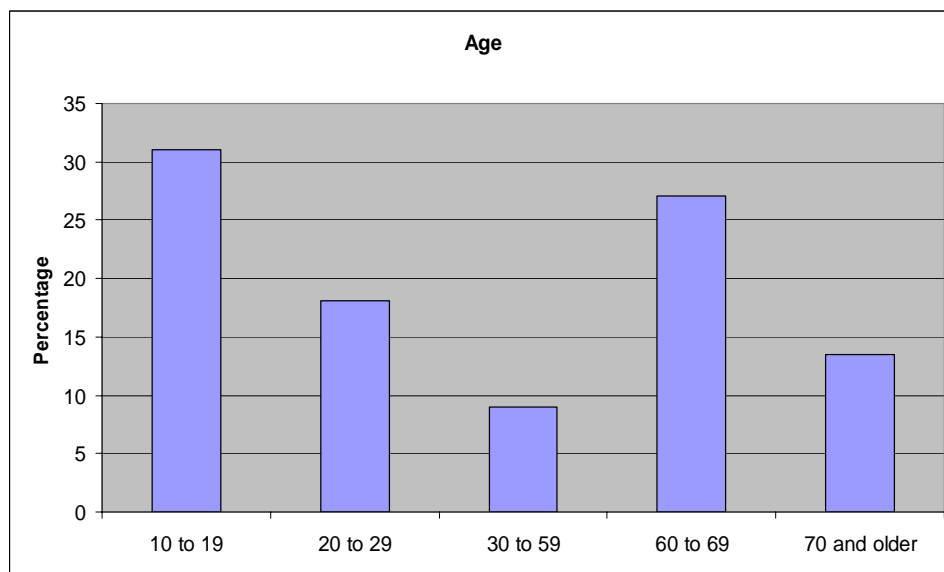


Figure 1 Age of respondents

Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Visitors' Study, STEP-UNI, 2004

Study respondents came from different locations, specifically, 49% of the visitors were local residents of the Cedar Falls/Waterloo area, whereas 51% came from other counties throughout Iowa. This shows that not only the people who live in the area, but also visitors from neighboring counties are using the trail systems.

Further, study participants were asked how they arrived to Cedar Falls/Waterloo. The majority responded they arrived by the automobile (67%, or 20 respondents), thirty percent arrived by motorhomes, and only 3% used airplanes. Figure 2 shows the distribution of responses.

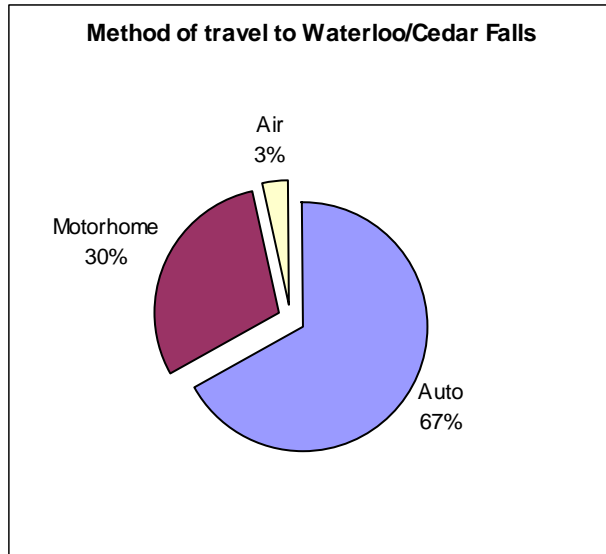


Figure 2 Method of travel to Waterloo/Cedar Falls

Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Visitors' Study, STEP-UNI, 2004

Majority of respondents indicated they have visited Cedar Falls/Waterloo before (97% of responses), versus 3% first time visitors. The main reason for visiting the area was pleasure (98% of responses), and only 2% were here for business.

In regards to frequency of visiting the area, 66% of respondents answered they visit the area frequently, 19% responded come occasionally, and 15% have been here once in the previous year (see Figure 3).

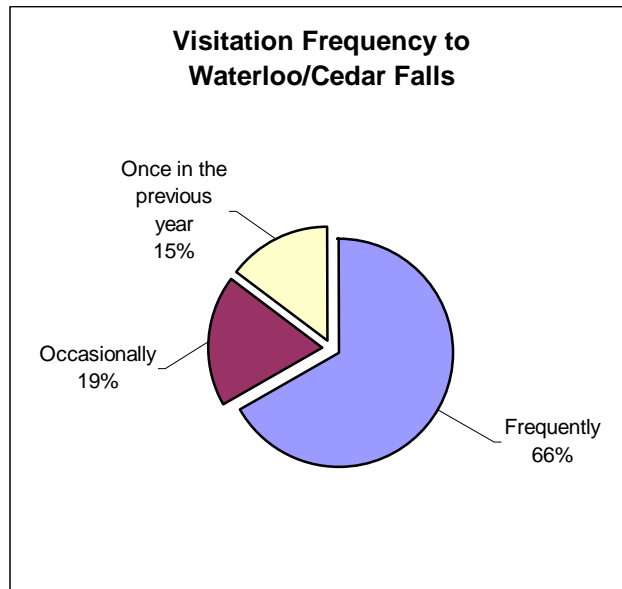


Figure 3 Visitation frequency to Waterloo/Cedar Falls

Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Visitors' Study, STEP-UNI, 2004

Several other questions concerning the patterns of visiting Waterloo/Cedar Falls, included the question of the number of nights spent in the area, and the traveling party composition.

Figure 4 depicts the distribution of the number of nights spent in Waterloo/Cedar Falls. As the figure shows, over seventy-five percent of respondents stayed overnight, versus thirteen percent who did not. Most often, visitors stayed in the area for 3 nights (40% of responses). Thirteen percent answered they stayed two or seven nights, and around seven percent stayed for either one, four or five nights.

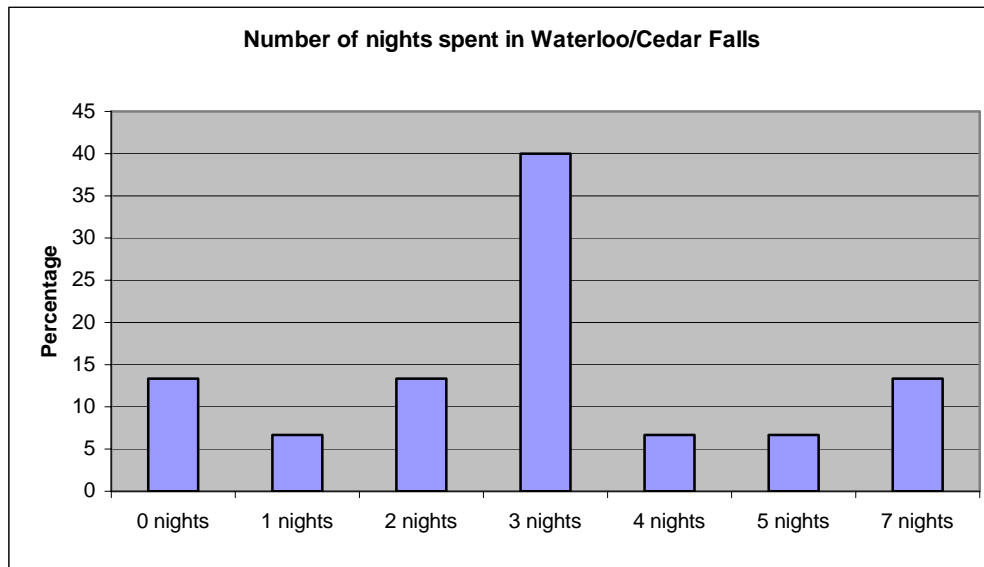


Figure 4 Number of nights spent in Waterloo/Cedar Falls

Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Visitors' Study, STEP-UNI, 2004

In regards to the composition of the traveling party, over thirty-eight percent were traveling with their family, fourteen percent were solo visitors, ten percent were a part of a sports team, almost seven percent came with either the tour group or a college group, and over three percent came with the high school group. Figure 5 shows the distribution of responses.

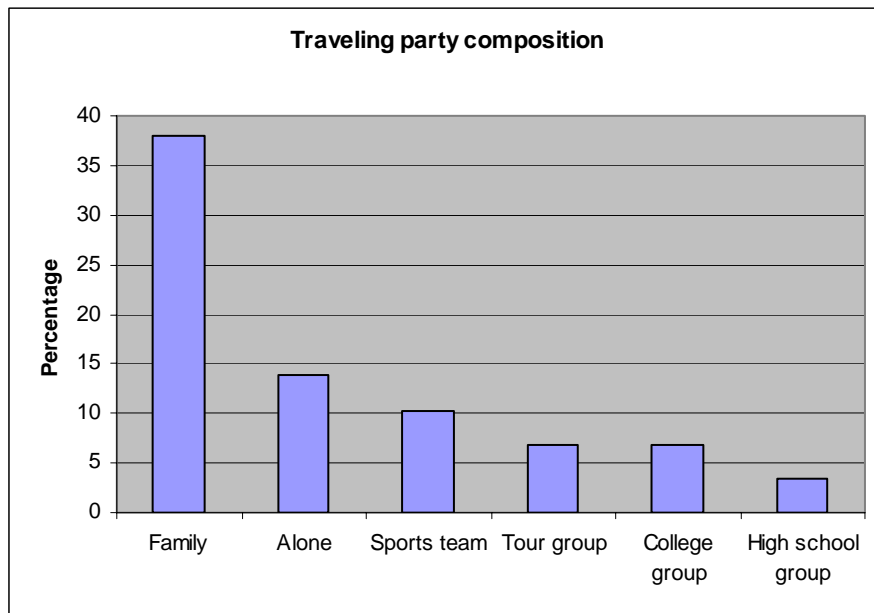


Figure 5 Traveling party composition

Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Visitors' Study, STEP-UNI, 2004

B. Income and Spending Patterns

When asked about their annual household income, the majority of the study participants indicated they were earning less than \$9,999 (almost 23%), followed by the two other groups who were earning \$25,000 - \$34,999 or \$75,000 – \$99,999 (14.3% of responses for each group). Figure 2 shows the distribution of the income categories among study respondents.

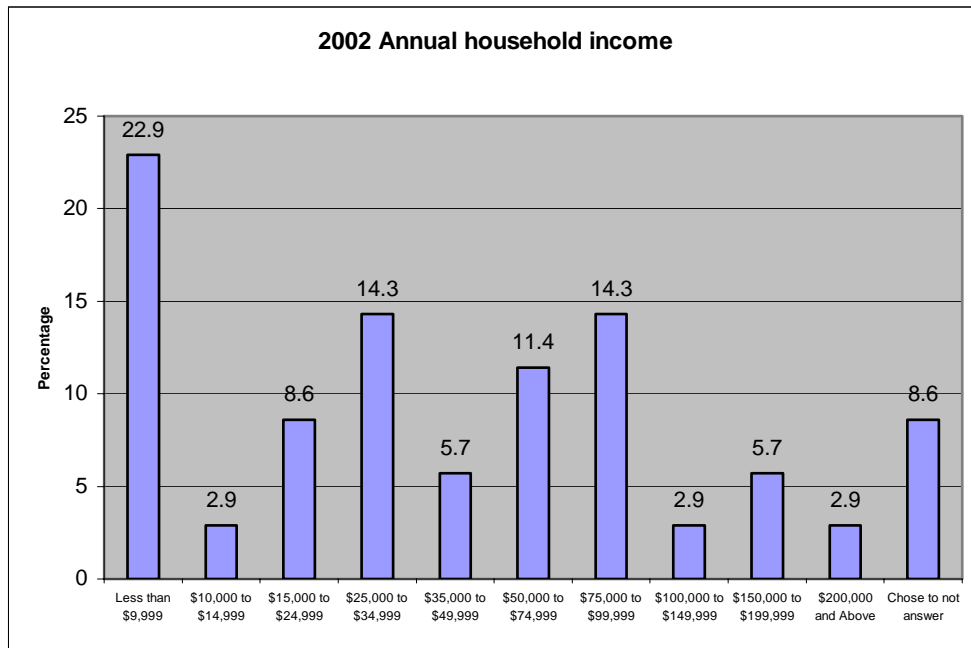


Figure 6 Annual household income as of 2002

Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Visitors’ Study, STEP-UNI, 2004

Next, respondents were asked to indicate how much they spent during their visit for lodging, meals/drinks, grocery, recreation etc. Figure 7 shows mean and median scores for all categories.

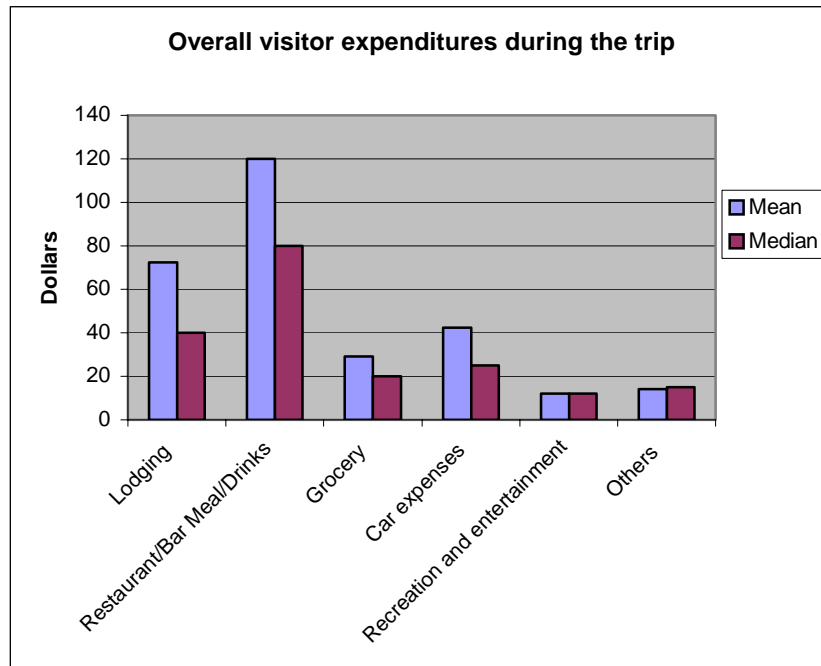


Figure 7 Overall visitor expenditures during the trip

Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Visitors' Study, STEP-UNI, 2004

Both mean and median scores were highest for the amounts spent on restaurants/bar meal/drinks (mean score=\$120; median score=\$80), followed by spending on lodging (mean score=\$72; median score=\$40), car expenses (mean score=\$42; median score=\$25) and groceries (mean score=\$29; median score=\$20).

Further, survey respondents were asked how many people in their traveling party these overall expenditures cover. Figure 8 shows the distribution of responses.

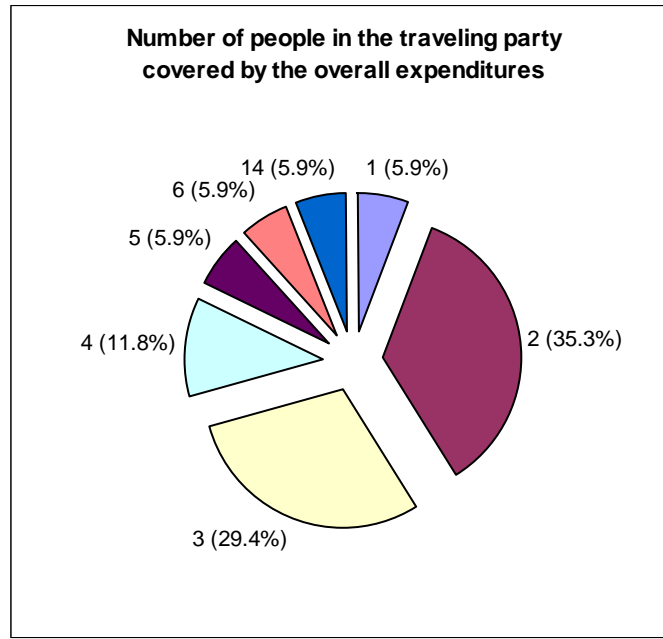


Figure 8 Number of people in traveling party covered by the overall expenditures

Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Visitors' Study, STEP-UNI, 2004

C. Sources of Information

The two other important issues to look at are the sources of information about the area and the effect of advertising on the decision to visit the area. In regards to the first question, respondents were asked whether they requested to receive any travel information prior to their visit. Only 14% (n=) answered positively, whereas the majority of 86% (n=) responded did not request any travel information.

Further, study participants were asked whether they saw any advertisement for travel to Waterloo/Cedar Falls prior to their trip (see Figure 9).

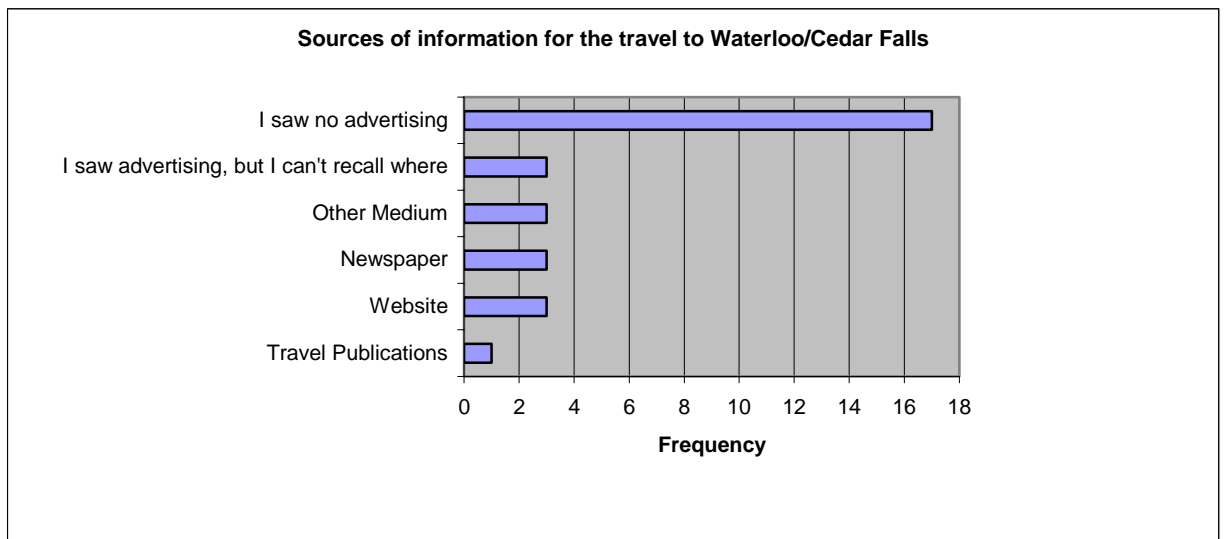


Figure 9 Sources of information for the travel

Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Visitors' Study, STEP-UNI, 2004

Figure 9 shows that the majority of trail system users are not being intrigued to Waterloo/Cedar Falls through any kind of information packet or advertisement. Those using advertisement got information through newspaper, website, other medium, and travel publications.

D. Satisfaction with the Visit

Study participants/ trail users were asked how satisfied they were with the visit to the area (see Figure 10). The majority (90% of responses) answered they were either very satisfied (48%) or satisfied (42%) with their visit, and only ten percent hesitated with their answer (choosing to respond as “neutral”).

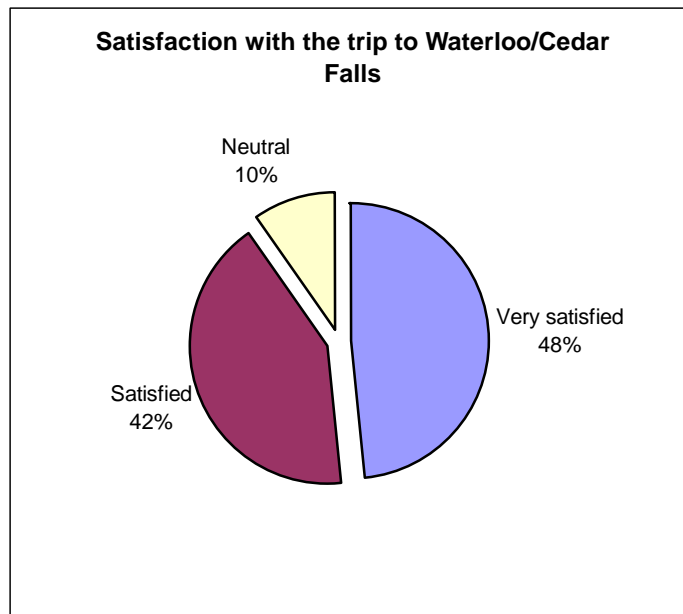


Figure 10 Satisfaction with the trip to Waterloo/Cedar Falls

Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Visitors' Study, STEP-UNI, 2004

To further explore the factors influencing the satisfaction with the trip, the survey respondents were asked what would prevent them from visiting Cedar Falls/Waterloo in the future. Figure 11 shows responses obtained.

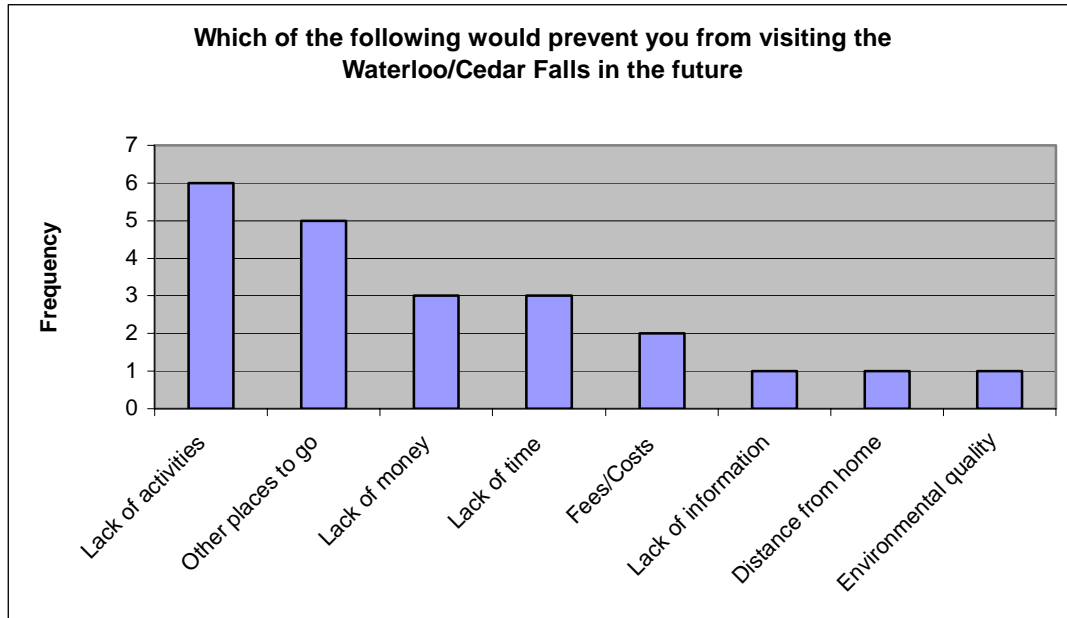


Figure 11 Possible factors preventing the future visit to the area

Source: Waterloo-Cedar Falls Visitors' Study, STEP-UNI, 2004

The figure depicts that the lack of activities had the highest frequency (n=6), followed by having other choices where to go (n=5) and the lack of money (n=3). The other factors that were indicated, included the lack of time, lack of information and the travel distance.