

Tourism Times

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2016 Exit Survey

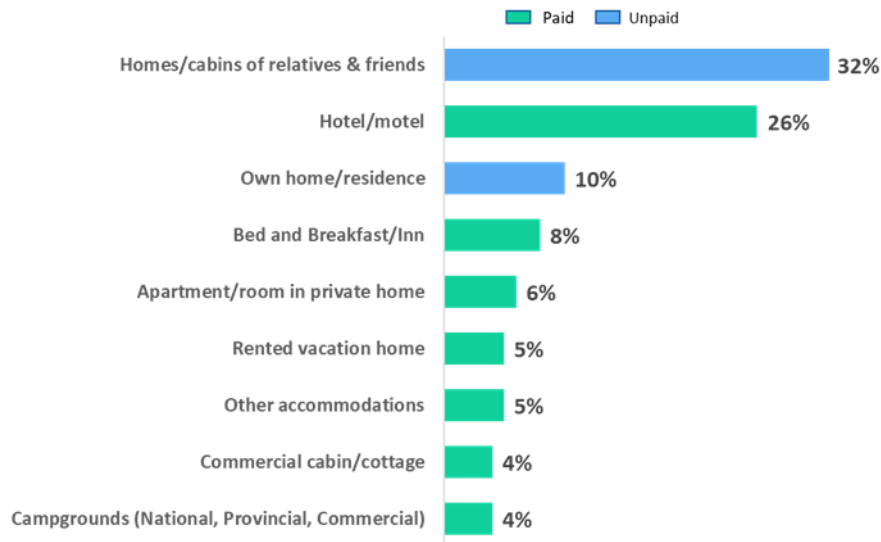
The Accommodation Sector: How experiences with paid accommodations impact the visitor journey

Recent trends have seen travel take on a more important role in people's lives, with many now preferring to check off "bucket list" experiences rather than amass material possessions. As people place a higher value on travel, they also come to expect more from the travel experience as a whole. Today's traveller spends countless hours deciding on a destination and most plan and book the details of their trip months in advance. Travellers choosing to vacation in Newfoundland and Labrador plan, on average, nearly five months in advance of their departure. Trip planning is taken seriously by visitors, from choosing what to do and see to selecting where to stay in their destination.

The accommodation sector, for example, plays a significant role in the overall visitor experience, and it is no surprise as spending on accommodations accounts for the largest share of visitor expenditures in the province. For every \$100 spent by visitors, \$39 is spent on accommodations, more than any other type of expenditure. This amount increases to \$43 for visitors who are in the province for vacation. The majority of visitors stay in paid accommodations during their trip – 75 per cent of all visitors stay at least one night in paid accommodations, with vacation visitors even more likely to do so (94%). Even 41 per cent of those travellers visiting friends and relatives (VFR), a market traditionally thought to stay at homes of family or friends or in other unpaid accommodations, actually spend at least one night in paid accommodations while in the province.

Visitors spent the majority of their nights (57%) in the province in some form of paid accommodations. Hotels and motels accounted for the largest share of *paid* nights (26%), followed by B&Bs/Inns at 8 per cent. Stays in rented vacation homes accounted for 5 per cent of all party nights while 4 per cent of nights were spent in commercial cabins/cottages and campgrounds, respectively. Six per cent of nights in the province were spent in apartments or rooms in a private home (not owned by friends/relatives), and another 5 per cent were spent in other paid forms of accommodations such as university residences and hostels. In terms of unpaid accommodations nights, 32 per cent of nights were spent at houses/cabins of friends and relatives, and 10 per cent were spent in properties owned by visitors.

**2016 Non-Resident Travel Parties
% of Party Nights by Type of Accommodation (May-October)**



Regardless of the type of accommodations chosen during their stay, the fact that our visitors spend a significant share of their travel budget on accommodations means that they place high value on quality and service. They use a wide variety of sources to research and select accommodations that meet their expectations and preferences. On a typical vacation, the majority of our visitors prefer above average or exceptional quality accommodations – choosing to stay in three star (34%) or four star (36%) accommodations. Nine percent of travellers typically use one and two star accommodations, while 6 per cent typically prefer more luxurious five star accommodations when they vacation. When choosing accommodations for their trip to Newfoundland and Labrador, however, most visitors (72%) said they did not use an accommodation rating system. Many visitors indicated that their accommodations were booked by someone else, so a rating system was not necessary. Other travellers cited location, proximity to a specific site or destination, guest reviews on websites like TripAdvisor, as well as personal recommendations from friends, family or locals as being more influential than a specific rating system when deciding where to stay in the province.

While most visitors do not tend to use an accommodation rating system to help choose accommodations in the province, they do rely on a number of other sources to research and select where to stay during their trip. Online sources dominate - websites of specific accommodations (41%), online hotel search/booking sites (40%), TripAdvisor (29%) and newfoundlandlabrador.com (17%) are the most commonly used. Offline sources, however, are still a go-to resource for many travellers. The Newfoundland and Labrador Traveller’s Guide (21%), personal recommendations (16%), phoning specific accommodations (13%), and experiences from a previous visit (12%) were all relatively common ways for travellers to select their accommodations.

Ultimately, visitors to the province were satisfied with their experience with paid accommodations – the vast majority (88%) said they were able to stay in paid accommodation properties that met their preferences. A further 10 per cent said they were *sometimes* able to stay in their preferred

accommodations, while only 3 per cent said they were unable to do so. This relatively small number of visitors who were unable to stay in their preferred accommodations most commonly cited general lack of availability (54%), issues with property amenities and services (15%), and limited choice in smaller communities (14%) as top reasons for not being able to stay at their preferred property type. Other visitor concerns included perceived high rates, the quality of amenities and the need for modernization or updating of facilities.

Overall, travellers expressed higher levels of satisfaction with the customer service they received at paid accommodations (84%) than with the facilities and amenities themselves (78%). Visitor comments reflect a deep appreciation of service personnel at accommodations throughout the province and their role in enhancing the overall visitor experience. The hospitality of staff and their willingness to go above and beyond to meet the needs of guests was frequently cited by visitors when asked about their general experience with accommodations during their stay. As the vast majority of our visitors, particularly vacationers, spend at least a portion of their stay in paid accommodations and the largest share of their travel budget on them, excellence in customer service continues to be a central component of delivering on expectations and providing a memorable visitor experience. While travellers remind us that there is still work to do to improve upon facilities and amenities offered at paid accommodations across the province, warm and friendly service truly leaves a lasting impression.