



POWELL COUNTY TOURISM COMMISSION 2023 ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary provides an overview of the key findings from a survey conducted to assess the demographics and opinions of visitors to the Red River Gorge area, as well as their suggestions for improving the tourism experience. The survey included 872 respondents, representing different age groups and relationships to the area.

Demographics:

The most common age range among respondents was 25-34, accounting for 33% of the total responses. The majority of respondents identified themselves as tourists (50%) or residents (38%), while smaller percentages were business owners (5%), passing through (4%), or visiting for work (3%).

Attractive Aspects:

The survey revealed that the most attractive aspects of the Red River Gorge area, as reported by visitors, were its scenery and natural beauty (86%), the opportunity for outdoor activities (65%), and the availability of local food options (39%). The majority of respondents expressed appreciation for the area's natural beauty and the range of activities it offers.

Issues Encountered:

Visitors encountered several issues during their trips, including problems with telephone service, parking availability, and last-minute accommodations. However, they also praised the scenic beauty, the local culture, and the enjoyable atmosphere of the area. Concerns were raised about hikers not respecting the land or others, limited parking at trailheads, closure of certain trails or bridges, and disturbances caused by noisy neighboring campers.

Cleanliness:

Overall, visitors had positive impressions of the area's cleanliness, mentioning that it was generally well-maintained. However, a few respondents pointed out specific issues such as graffiti and litter in certain spots. Suggestions were made to improve cleanup efforts, increase education on leaving no trace, and implement better signage and practices to maintain cleanliness consistently.

Local Residents' Benefits:

An increase in tourism was seen as beneficial to local residents in Powell County. It would bring in more tax revenue for community improvements, create job opportunities, boost the local economy, provide access to a wider range of amenities, and promote cultural exchange. Residents expressed the importance of preserving the area's natural beauty while capitalizing on tourism.



Local Businesses' Benefits:

Local businesses in Powell County would benefit from increased tourism through higher sales and revenue, expansion opportunities, investment in better services and facilities, and overall economic growth. Striking a balance between growth and preserving the natural beauty of the area was emphasized, along with sustainable tourism practices.

Improvements to Enhance Tourism Experience:

Several suggestions were provided to enhance the tourism experience in the Red River Gorge area. These included developing a comprehensive tourist website, creating more water-based recreational options, introducing a local brewery and water park, improving guided tours and educational programs, enhancing visitor amenities and infrastructure, and strengthening internet and Wi-Fi connectivity.

Noteworthy Findings:

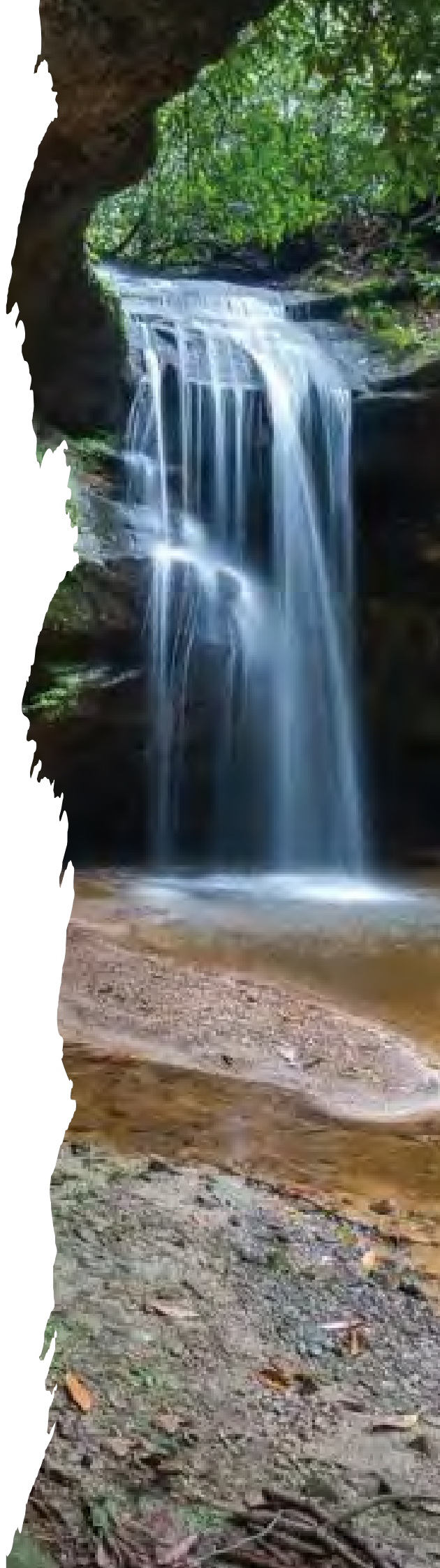
One noteworthy finding is that the most common way respondents heard about the Red River Gorge area was through word-of-mouth, with 40% of respondents indicating that they heard about it from a friend or family member. This suggests the significant influence of personal recommendations in attracting visitors to the area. Additionally, social media played a significant role, with 32% of respondents hearing about the Red River Gorge through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. This highlights the potential of social media as a cost-effective marketing tool for businesses in the area, particularly through targeted ads that can reach individuals based on their connections and interests.

Another noteworthy finding is that hiking emerged as the most popular activity among visitors to the Red River Gorge area, with 80% of respondents indicating their engagement in this activity. This showcases the area's appeal as a destination for outdoor enthusiasts and nature lovers. Sightseeing, dining, and camping were also popular activities, indicating the diverse range of experiences available to visitors.

In addition to the previous findings, the survey also collected data on the typical amount of money respondents spend when visiting the Red River Gorge area. The results show a range of spending patterns among visitors.

One noteworthy finding is that the most common spending range reported by respondents was between \$101 and \$200, with 22% of respondents falling into this category. This suggests that a significant portion of visitors is willing to spend a moderate amount during their trip, indicating a level of investment in their experience at the Red River Gorge.

Furthermore, 19% of respondents reported spending less than \$100 during their visit, highlighting the presence of budget-conscious visitors who may be attracted to the affordability and accessibility of the area.



The survey also revealed that 4% of respondents indicated spending \$1,000 or more during their trip, indicating the presence of high-spending visitors who may contribute significantly to the local economy through their expenditures.

Furthermore, the survey revealed that a significant majority of respondents (76.63%) expressed their likelihood of recommending the Red River Gorge area as a tourism destination to friends and family as "extremely likely." This high level of satisfaction and willingness to endorse the area indicates the positive experiences and memorable moments visitors have had, underscoring the area's potential for positive word-of-mouth promotion and attracting new visitors.

Overall, these noteworthy findings highlight the importance of personal recommendations and social media in spreading awareness about the Red River Gorge area, as well as the popularity of outdoor activities like hiking. The high likelihood of visitors recommending the area to others indicates a strong potential for continued growth in tourism and reinforces the positive reputation of the Red River Gorge as a desirable destination.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the survey findings highlight the attractiveness of the Red River Gorge area's natural beauty, outdoor activities, and local food options. Visitors encountered challenges related to telecommunications, parking, and accommodations but also appreciated the area's scenic beauty and overall atmosphere. Suggestions for improvement focused on cleanliness, infrastructure, amenities, and enhancing the overall tourism experience. By addressing these suggestions and balancing growth with preservation, the Red River Gorge area can further attract visitors, benefit local residents, and support the growth of businesses in Powell County.



Index

Introduction and Research Methods	06
Assessment Demographics	07
Assessment Data by Category	10
Tourism Section	10
Residents Section	24
Business Owner Section	26
Secondary Data Source Research	29



Introduction and Research Methods

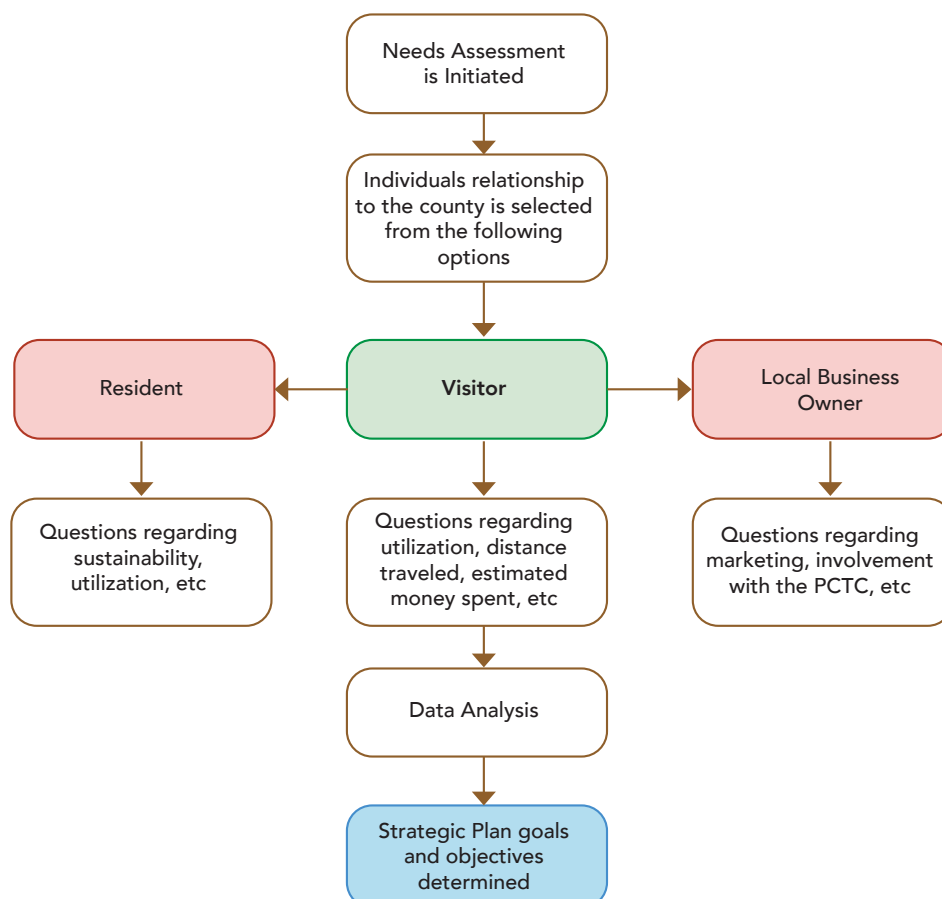
Introduction:

The purpose of this assessment report was to provide a comprehensive analysis of the state of tourism in Powell County as it applies to the Powell County Tourism Commission, with the aim of developing a strategic plan to address the needs and opportunities within the tourism industry. To achieve this, our team with assistance from the Powell County Tourism Commission gathered relevant data through various means, including surveys and existing sources. This report outlines the research methods employed and presents the findings that formed the basis of the strategic plan.

Research Methods:

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the state of tourism in Powell County, our research methodology involved both primary and secondary data collection. The primary data was gathered through a survey conducted among residents, business owners, tourist, and individuals who are “passing through” and don’t fit neatly into the other categories. The survey aimed to gather information on visitor demographics, spending patterns, activities they are engaged in, and their perspectives on the tourism industry in Powell County. The findings from this survey provided valuable insights into the current trends and preferences of tourists, which will guide the development of the strategic plan.

To demonstrate the data collection process, a QR code was distributed throughout the county and neighboring areas to the Red River Gorge. This QR code provided access to an online survey platform, where participants could respond to the survey questions. Additionally, the survey was posted on Facebook by the Powell County Tourism Commission and valuable community partners to further engage the local population and visitors of the region. It is important to note that the sample survey provided was representative of the survey instrument, but not the complete survey population. The below image is demonstrative of the survey format:



In addition to the primary data collection, we also utilized existing sources of information on tourism in the area. This included conducting a thorough review of relevant studies, reports, and publications that had examined tourism in Powell County. By incorporating these existing sources, we gained a broader perspective and ensured that the strategic plan was informed by a comprehensive range of insights.

The combination of surveys and existing sources provided a well-rounded understanding of the state of tourism in Powell County. By leveraging both primary and secondary data, we ensured that the strategic plan addressed the most pressing needs and opportunities within the tourism industry, while taking into account the perspectives of those who were most directly impacted.

Overall, the research methods employed in this assessment allowed us to gather reliable and comprehensive data, which will serve as the foundation for the development of a strategic plan that maximized the potential of tourism in Powell County.

Assessment Demographics

Below is a table displaying survey respondents by age. The most common response was the age range of 25-34 with being the most common age range

What is your age?	Count	Percent
18-24	64	7%
25-34	290	33%
35-44	246	28%
45+	266	31%
Prefer not to say	5	1%
Under 18	1	0%
Total	872	100%

The table below represents respondents by category. Category was determined by the following question and potential responses: What is your relationship to the Red River Gorge area? Tourist, Resident, Business owner, Passing through, Work.

What is your relationship to the Red River Gorge area?	Count	Percent
Tourist	437	50%
Resident	328	38%
Business owner	41	5%
Passing through	39	4%
Work	29	3%
Total	874	100%

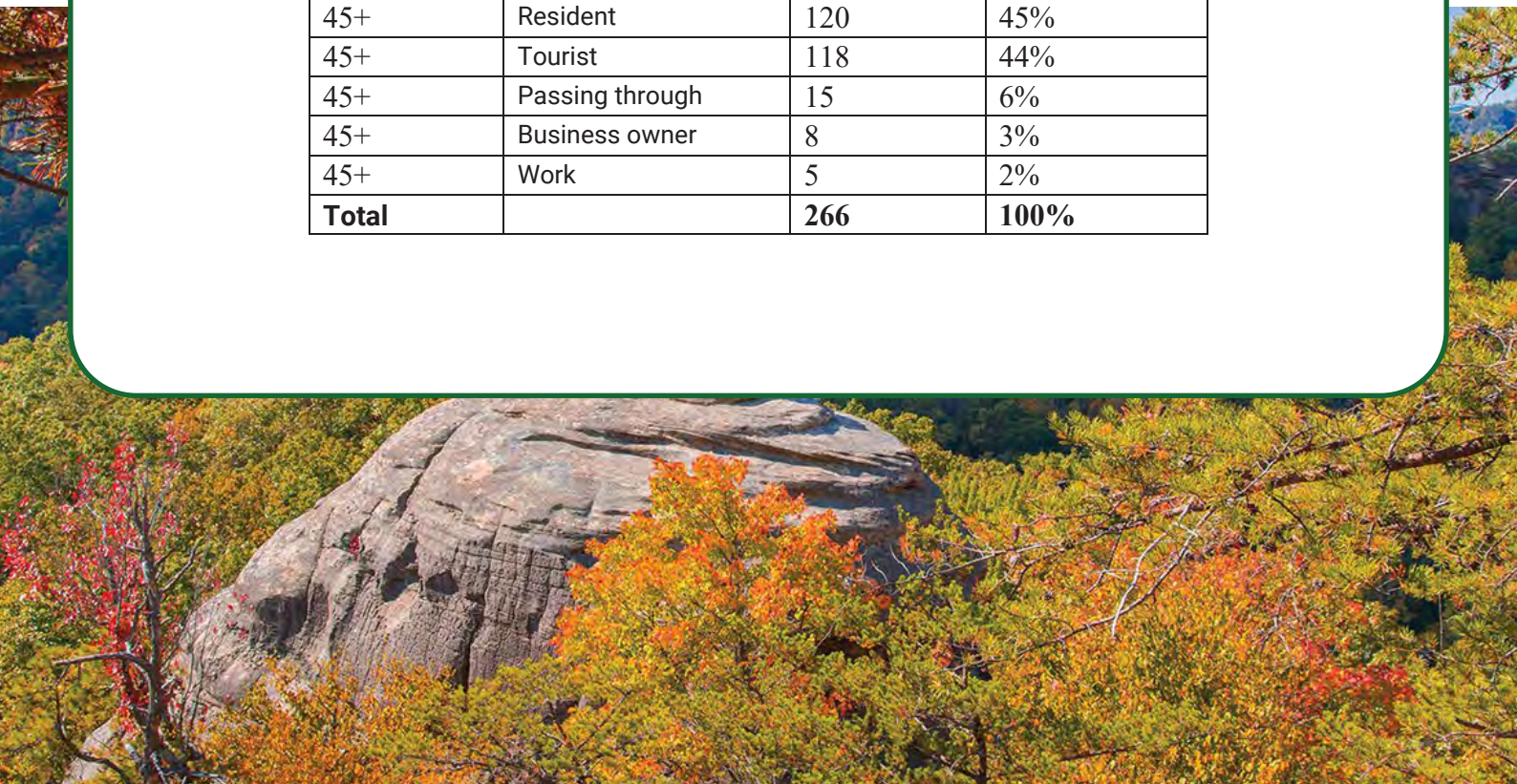
The following tables represent the individual respondents age with their corresponding categorical relationship. Due to low response rates individuals under 18 and who preferred not to say are not included.

Age	Relationship	Count	Percent
18-24	Resident	32	50%
18-24	Tourist	27	42%
18-24	Business owner	4	6%
18-24	Passing through	1	2%
18-24	Work	0	0%
Total		64	100%

Age	Relationship	Count	Percent
25-34	Tourist	152	52%
25-34	Resident	98	34%
25-34	Business owner	18	6%
25-34	Work	13	4%
25-34	Passing through	9	3%
Total		290	100%

Age	Relationship	Count	Percent
35-44	Tourist	137	56%
35-44	Resident	77	31%
35-44	Business owner	10	4%
35-44	Work	10	4%
35-44	Passing through	12	5%
Total		246	100%

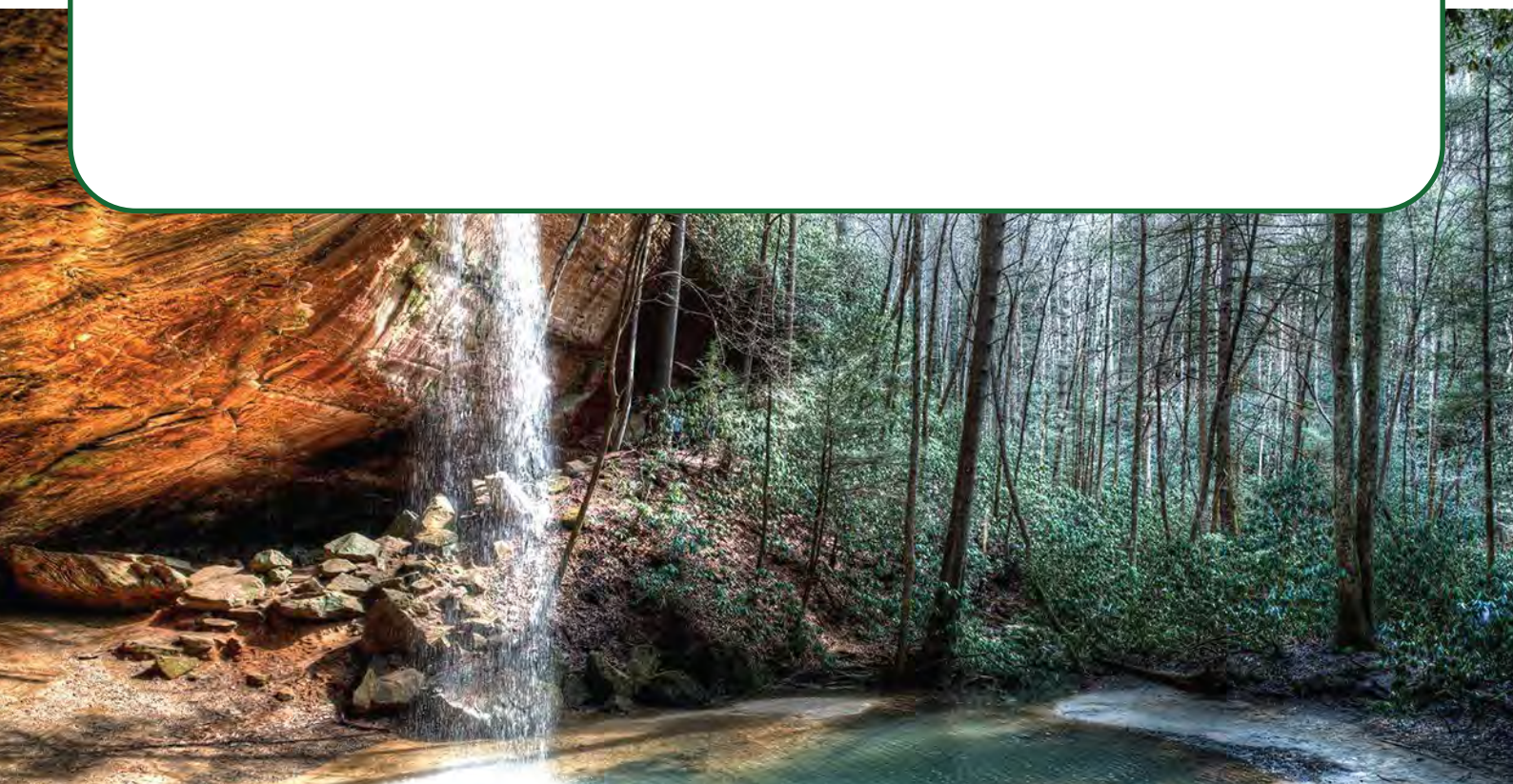
Age	Relationship	Count	Percent
45+	Resident	120	45%
45+	Tourist	118	44%
45+	Passing through	15	6%
45+	Business owner	8	3%
45+	Work	5	2%
Total		266	100%



All respondents were asked: “What do you think are the most attractive aspects of the Red River Gorge area as a tourist destination?” Respondents were able to select multiple answers and were not limited on how many options they could choose. The table below is representative of all possible responses. Please note that the survey was accessed by 878 individuals. Some individuals who accessed the survey did not complete the survey so response counts may vary by question. The percentage for this question is determined by the number of times an option was selected divided by the total number of respondents. The count represents the total number of answers provided by those 878 individuals.

What do you think are the most attractive aspects of the Red River Gorge area as a tourist destination?	Count	Percent
Scenery/Natural beauty	753	86%
Being active outdoors	569	65%
The local culture and people	372	42%
Local food options	344	39%
Camping	336	38%
The range of accommodations	202	23%
You never have the same experience twice	1	0%
Total	2577	N/A

The most common response for this question was Scenery/Natural beauty with 86% of respondents selecting this option. Additionally, 65% of respondents selected being active outdoors as one of the most attractive aspects. “You never have the same experience twice” was entered on 1 occasion as an “other” option was included that required the respondent to provide details in a short answer format. Providing that the other option was selected on only 1 occasion is indicative that the responses included in the survey were comprehensive. Additionally, the results indicate that majority of respondents enjoy being active outdoors in the natural beauty the Red River Gorge has to offer.



Assessment Data by Category

Tourism Section

The below table represents all answers for individuals who selected tourist, work, or passing through as their relationship with the Red River Gorge.

Respondents were asked the following question: Have you visited the Red River Gorge area before? All the responses are represented in the table below

Have you visited the Slade Welcome Center?	Count	Percent
Yes	371	74%
No	129	26%
Total	500	100%

The table below represents a positive impact by the Powell County Tourism Commission. 75% of individuals who identified as tourist reported visiting the Slade Welcome Center.

Have you visited the Slade Welcome Center?	Relationship to the RRG	Count	Percent
Yes	Tourist	325	75.23%
No	Tourist	107	24.77%
Total		432	100%

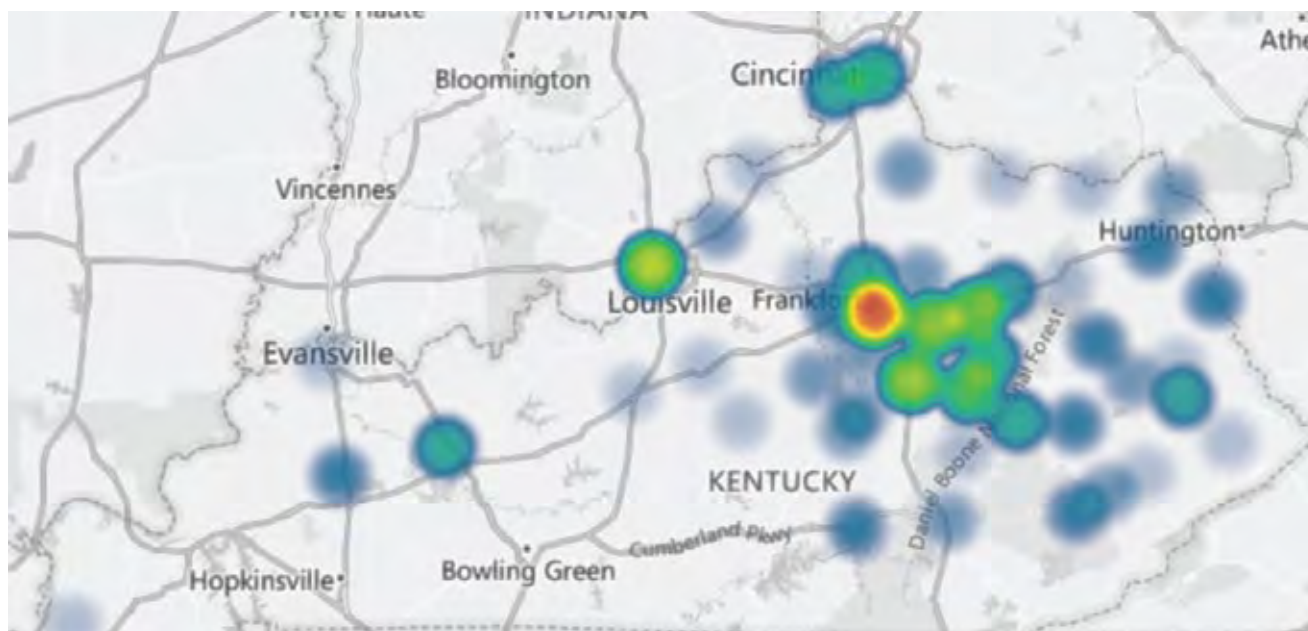
Additional notable data of use is included below:

Age	How often do you visit the Red River Gorge area?	Count	Percent
25-34	0-1 times per year	26	15%
25-34	2-3 times per year	59	34%
25-34	4 times a year or more	82	47%
25-34	I am just passing through	3	2%
25-34	N/A I am a resident/work here	4	2%
Total		174	100%

Age	How often do you visit the Red River Gorge area?	Count	Percent
35-44	0-1 times per year	38	24%
35-44	2-3 times per year	43	27%
35-44	4 times a year or more	68	43 %
35-44	I am just passing through	5	3%
35-44	N/A I am a resident/work here	5	3%
Total		159	100%

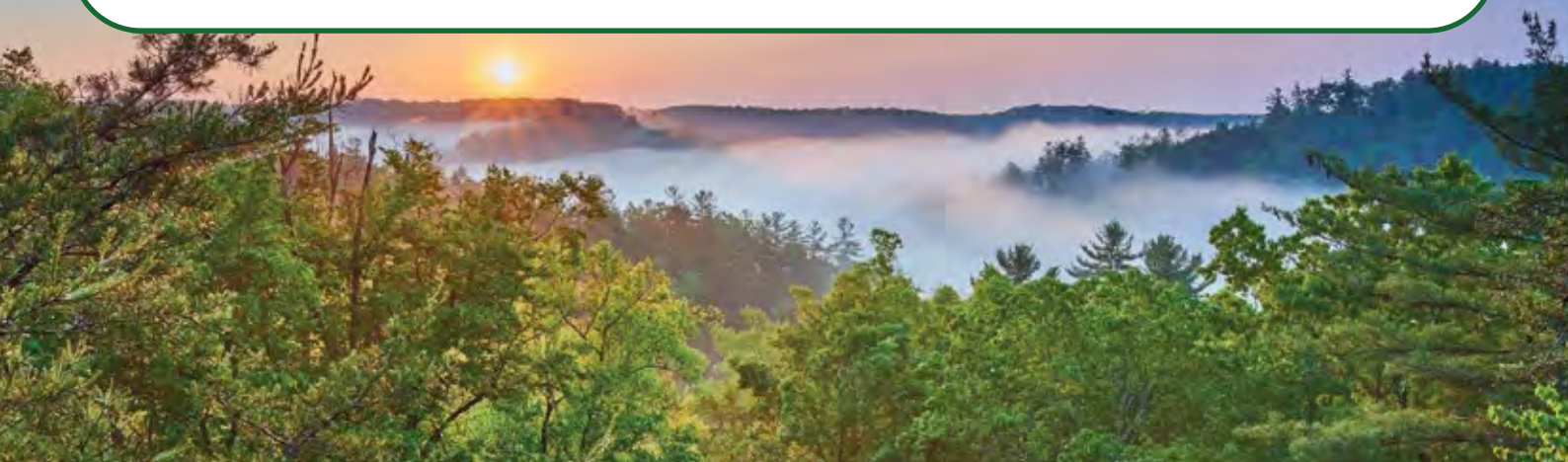
Age	How often do you visit the Red River Gorge area?	Count	Percent
45+	0-1 times per year	37	27%
45+	2-3 times per year	30	22%
45+	4 times a year or more	61	44%
45+	I am just passing through	9	7%
45+	N/A I am a resident/work here	1	1%
Total		138	100%

The following question was asked in the survey: Where are you visiting from? (if from Kentucky enter county, if from another state enter the state, if international enter nation) Below is a heat map of respondents grouped by county entered for the question. Please note that a significant amount of data cleaning was required for this question and only 272 responses were included for mapping purposes.



Additionally, respondents entered the following states and countries they were visiting from:

Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia. Visitors came from different countries such as Australia, Canada, China, and the United Kingdom.



The following question was asked of respondents: How did you hear about the Red River Gorge area? Check all that apply. All the responses are represented in the table below

How did you hear about the Red River Gorge area? Check all that apply.	Count	Percent
Television	50	10%
I live or used to live nearby	174	34%
I have family or friends in the area	120	24%
I heard from a friend or family member	202	40%
Social media	164	32%
A Tourism website	79	16%
Magazine/print advertisement or article	30	6%
Other	53	10%
Total	872	N/A

The most common response to the question was "I heard from a friend or family member". Also worth noting, 32% of respondents heard about the Red River Gorge area via Social media. This could prove as a viable low-cost marketing strategy for businesses in the area who are able to utilize targeted ads at low cost in areas where frequent visitors originated from.

The following question was asked of respondents: What activities do you typically engage in when visiting the Red River Gorge area? Check all that apply. The table below shows that the most common activity individuals engage in during their trip is Hiking, with 80% of respondents selecting that activity. The 2nd, 3rd, and 4th most common activities were Sight Seeing, Dining, and Camping. All the responses are summarized in the table below.

What activities do you typically engage in when visiting the Red River Gorge area? Check all that apply.	Count	Percent
Hiking	402	80%
Sight Seeing	334	66%
Dining	271	54%
Camping	234	46%
Visiting attractions	192	38%
Kayaking/Canoeing	184	36%
Festivals and/or music venues	150	30%
Rock Climbing	66	13%
Bicycle riding	60	12%
off-roading/OHV	36	7%
Drag racing	29	6%
Total	1958	N/A

The following question was asked of respondents to gauge the typical duration of a planned trip to the Red River Gorge: What is the intended duration of your planned stay? All the responses are represented in the table below.

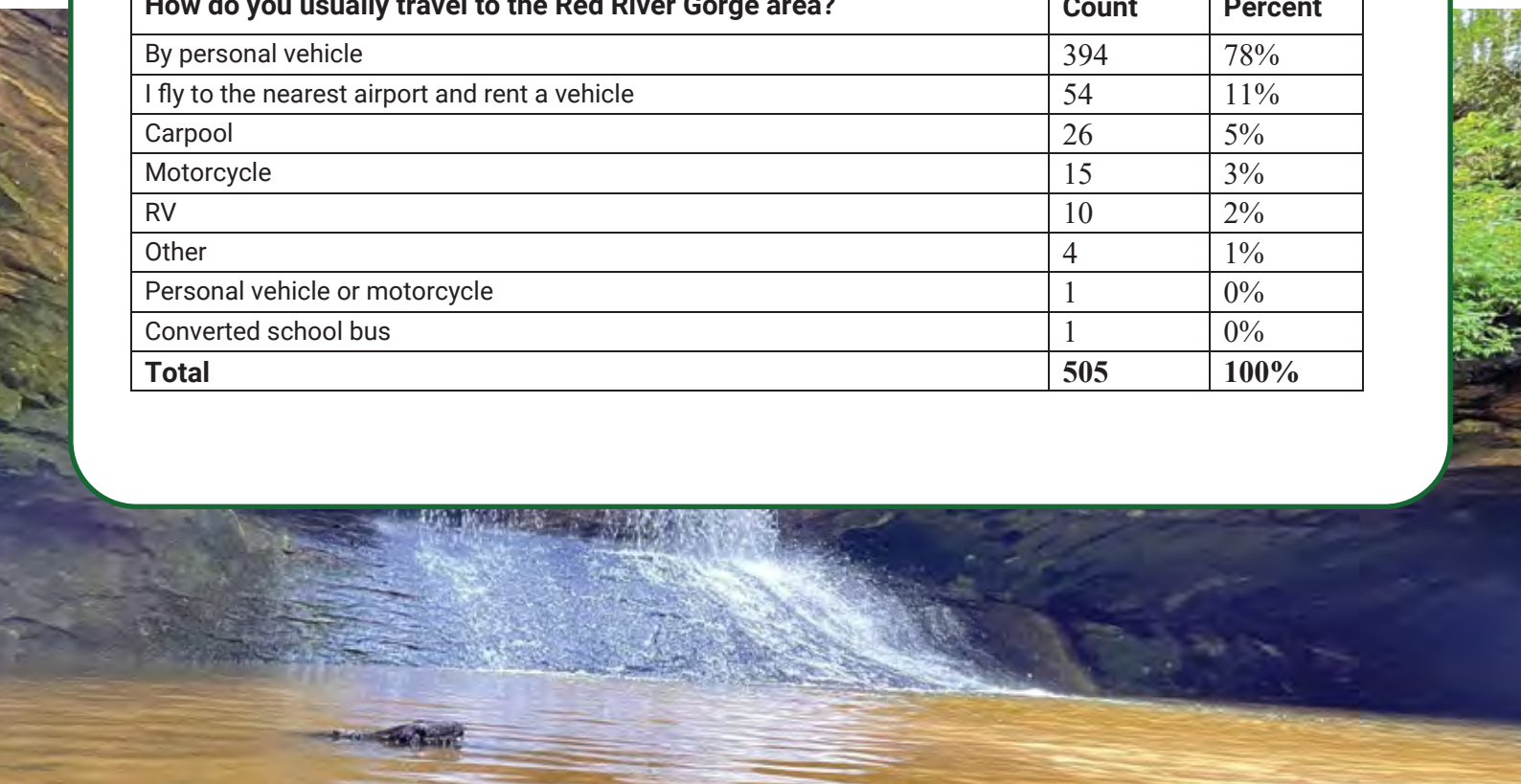
What is the intended duration of your planned stay?	Count	Percent
A weekend to a week	249	49%
A weekend or less	237	47%
More than a week	18	4%
Total	504	100%

The following question was asked of respondents: How would you rate the friendliness of people in the area? 1 is scored as Very Unfriendly and 5 is scored as Very Friendly. All the responses are represented in the table below.

How would you rate the friendliness of people in the area?	Count	Percent
1	2	0.4%
2	2	0.4%
3	24	4.8%
4	152	30.1%
5	325	64.4%
Total	505	100%

The following question was asked of respondents: How do you usually travel to the Red River Gorge area? All the responses are summarized in the table below.

How do you usually travel to the Red River Gorge area?	Count	Percent
By personal vehicle	394	78%
I fly to the nearest airport and rent a vehicle	54	11%
Carpool	26	5%
Motorcycle	15	3%
RV	10	2%
Other	4	1%
Personal vehicle or motorcycle	1	0%
Converted school bus	1	0%
Total	505	100%



The following question was asked of respondents: When planning your activities in the Red River Gorge area do you plan them in advance or upon arrival? All the responses are represented in the table below.

When planning your activities in the Red River Gorge area do you plan them in advance or upon arrival?	Count	Percent
In advance	353	70%
Upon arrival	148	30%
Total	501	100%

The below tables represent planning, broken down by age demographic. The below tables indicate that the younger demographics tend to do more advanced planning than individuals 45+

The implications of this data point suggest that targeted advertising by business who offer guided events or are time and place specific may benefit from targeted advertisements in those age ranges.

Age	When planning your activities in the Red River Gorge area do you plan them in advance or upon arrival?	Count
18-24	In advance	19
18-24	Upon arrival	9
Total		28

Age	When planning your activities in the Red River Gorge area do you plan them in advance or upon arrival?	Count
25-34	In advance	130
25-34	Upon arrival	41
Total		171

Age	When planning your activities in the Red River Gorge area do you plan them in advance or upon arrival?	Count
35-44	In advance	108
35-44	Upon arrival	51
Total		159

Age	When planning your activities in the Red River Gorge area do you plan them in advance or upon arrival?	Count
45+	In advance	92
45+	Upon arrival	46
Total		138

Respondents were asked the following question: How long do you usually stay in the Red River Gorge area? All the responses are represented in the table below.

How long do you usually stay in the Red River Gorge area?	Count
1-2 days	237
3-4 days	176
4 days - a week	76
Longer than a week	16
Total	505

The following question was asked of respondents: How much money do you typically spend when visiting the Red River Gorge area? All the responses are represented in the table below.

How much money do you typically spend when visiting the Red River Gorge area?	Count	Column1
\$101 - \$200	113	22%
Less than \$100	97	19%
\$201 - \$400	95	19%
\$401 - \$600	68	13%
\$800 - \$1,000	61	12%
\$601 - \$800	49	10%
\$1,000 or more	22	4%
Total	505	100%



The following table represents these results by age:

Age	Spending	Count	Column1
Under 18	\$1,000 or more	0	0%
Under 18	\$101 - \$200	0	0%
Under 18	\$201 - \$400	0	0%
Under 18	\$401 - \$600	0	0%
Under 18	\$601 - \$800	0	0%
Under 18	\$800 - \$1,000	0	0%
Under 18	Less than \$100	0	0%
Prefer not to say	\$1,000 or more	0	0%
Prefer not to say	\$101 - \$200	3	1%
Prefer not to say	\$201 - \$400	2	0%
Prefer not to say	\$401 - \$600	0	0%
Prefer not to say	\$601 - \$800	0	0%
Prefer not to say	\$800 - \$1,000	0	0%
Prefer not to say	Less than \$100	1	0%
45+	\$1,000 or more	3	1%
45+	\$101 - \$200	46	9%
45+	\$201 - \$400	24	5%
45+	\$401 - \$600	16	3%
45+	\$601 - \$800	9	2%
45+	\$800 - \$1,000	7	1%
45+	Less than \$100	33	7%
35-44	\$1,000 or more	12	2%
35-44	\$101 - \$200	33	7%
35-44	\$201 - \$400	34	7%
35-44	\$401 - \$600	21	4%
35-44	\$601 - \$800	11	2%
35-44	\$800 - \$1,000	17	3%
35-44	Less than \$100	31	6%
25-34	\$1,000 or more	6	1%
25-34	\$101 - \$200	25	5%
25-34	\$201 - \$400	29	6%
25-34	\$401 - \$600	28	6%
25-34	\$601 - \$800	28	6%
25-34	\$800 - \$1,000	34	7%
25-34	Less than \$100	24	5%
18-24	\$1,000 or more	1	0%
18-24	\$101 - \$200	6	1%
18-24	\$201 - \$400	6	1%
18-24	\$401 - \$600	3	1%
18-24	\$601 - \$800	1	0%
18-24	\$800 - \$1,000	3	1%
18-24	Less than \$100	8	2%
Total		505	100%

Respondents were asked the following question: How likely are you to recommend the Red river gorge area as a tourism destination to friends and family? All the responses are represented in the table below.

How likely are you to recommend the Red River Gorge area as a tourism destination to friends and family?	Count	Percent
Extremely Unlikely	2	0.40%
Unlikely	2	0.40%
Neutral	19	3.76%
Likely	95	18.81%
Extremely Likely	387	76.63%
Total	505	100%

Respondents were asked the following question: How would you rate your experience? All the responses are represented in the table below.

How would you rate your experience?	Count	Percent
Very Poor	0	0%
Poor	0	0%
Neutral	23	5%
Good	107	21%
Excellent	375	74%
Total	505	100%

Respondents were asked the following question: Would you come back to visit the Red River Gorge area? All the responses are represented in the table below.

Would you come back to visit the Red River Gorge area?	Count	Percent
Yes	484	96%
Maybe	21	4%
No	0	0%
Total	505	100%

Respondents were asked the following question: What kind of accommodations did you utilize while staying in the Red River Gorge area? Check all that apply: All the responses are represented in the table below.

What kind of accommodations did you utilize while staying in the Red River Gorge area? Check all that apply.	Count	Percent
Cabin rental	223	44%
Camping (at campsite)	216	43%
Other	180	36%
Backwoods camping with permit	130	26%
Short - term rentals other than a cabin	99	20%
RV park	79	16%
I stayed with family	51	10%
I stayed with a friend	30	6%
Total	1008	N/A

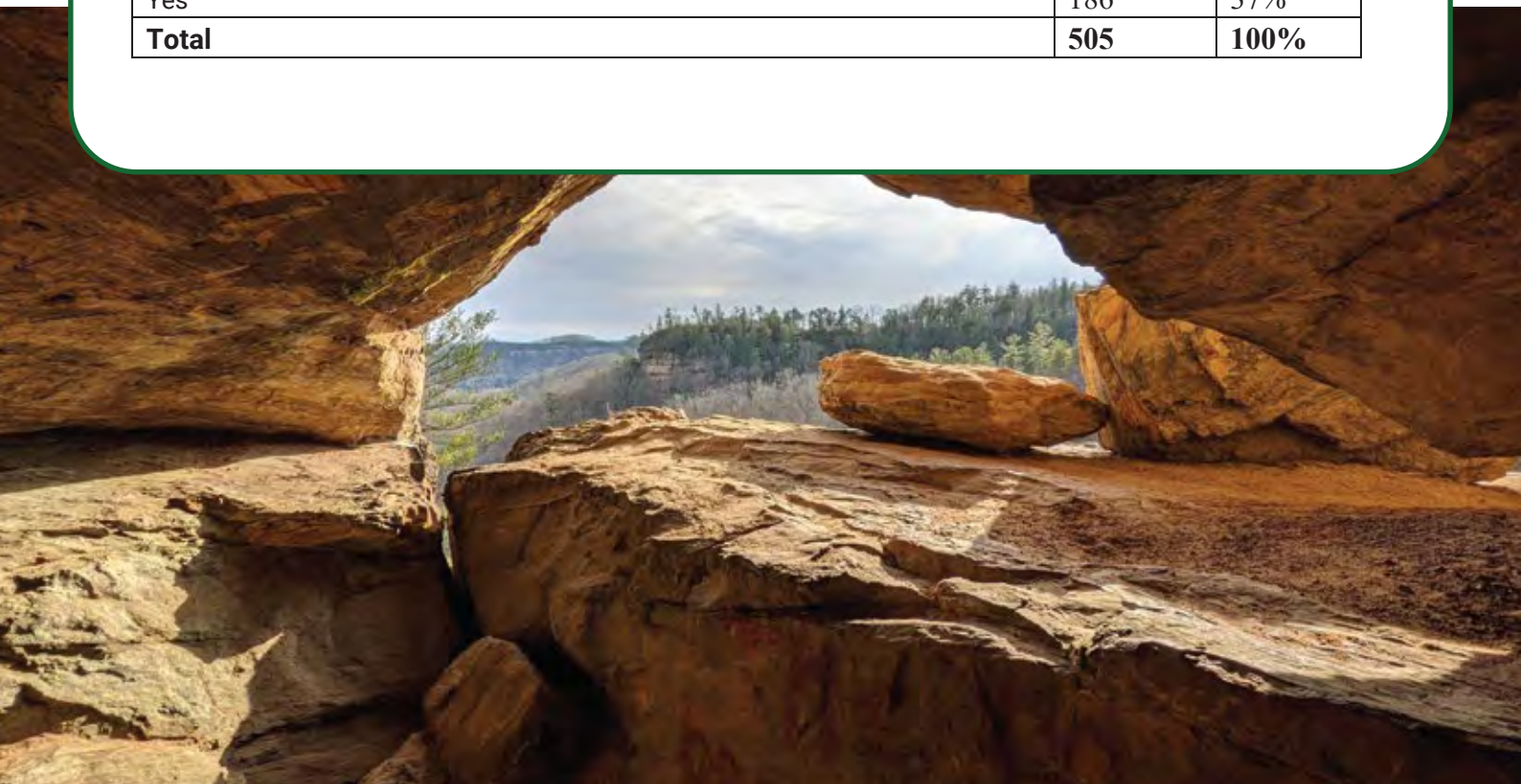
The table below represents money spent by the respondent with the corresponding accommodation type and is sorted by accommodation type and most likely spending category:

Money Spent	Accommodation Type	Count	Percent
\$800-\$1,000	Backwoods camping with permit	31	3.4%
\$201-\$400	Backwoods camping with permit	25	2.8%
\$101-\$200	Backwoods camping with permit	23	2.5%
Less than \$100	Backwoods camping with permit	20	2.2%
\$401-\$600	Backwoods camping with permit	14	1.5%
\$601-\$800	Backwoods camping with permit	14	1.5%
\$1,000 or more	Backwoods camping with permit	3	0.3%
\$201-\$400	Cabin rental	58	6.4%
\$101-\$200	Cabin rental	43	4.7%
\$800-\$1,000	Cabin rental	33	3.6%
\$401-\$600	Cabin rental	32	3.5%
Less than \$100	Cabin rental	22	2.4%
\$601-\$800	Cabin rental	19	2.1%
\$1,000 or more	Cabin rental	16	1.8%
\$101-\$200	Camping (at campsite)	52	5.7%
\$201-\$400	Camping (at campsite)	44	4.8%
\$800-\$1,000	Camping (at campsite)	31	3.4%
\$401-\$600	Camping (at campsite)	29	3.2%
Less than \$100	Camping (at campsite)	29	3.2%
\$601-\$800	Camping (at campsite)	23	2.5%
\$1,000 or more	Camping (at campsite)	8	0.9%
\$101-\$200	I stayed with a friend	10	1.1%
Less than \$100	I stayed with a friend	8	0.9%
\$800-\$1,000	I stayed with a friend	4	0.4%
\$1,000 or more	I stayed with a friend	2	0.2%
\$601-\$800	I stayed with a friend	2	0.2%
\$201-\$400	I stayed with a friend	2	0.2%
\$401-\$600	I stayed with a friend	1	0.1%
Less than \$100	I stayed with family	11	1.2%
\$101-\$200	I stayed with family	11	1.2%
\$401-\$600	I stayed with family	7	0.8%
\$601-\$800	I stayed with family	7	0.8%
\$800-\$1,000	I stayed with family	7	0.8%
\$1,000 or more	I stayed with family	4	0.4%
\$201-\$400	I stayed with family	4	0.4%
Less than \$100	Other	36	4.0%
\$101-\$200	Other	23	2.5%

Money Spent	Accommodation Type	Count	Percent
\$201 - \$400	Other	12	1.3%
\$401 - \$600	Other	4	0.4%
\$800 - \$1,000	Other	3	0.3%
\$1,000 or more	Other	2	0.2%
\$601 - \$800	Other	1	0.1%
\$401 - \$600	RV park	21	2.3%
\$800 - \$1,000	RV park	17	1.9%
\$601 - \$800	RV park	15	1.7%
\$201 - \$400	RV park	12	1.3%
\$101 - \$200	RV park	7	0.8%
\$1,000 or more	RV park	5	0.6%
Less than \$100	RV park	2	0.2%
\$201 - \$400	Short - term rentals other than a cabin	19	2.1%
\$800 - \$1,000	Short - term rentals other than a cabin	18	2.0%
\$401 - \$600	Short - term rentals other than a cabin	17	1.9%
\$601 - \$800	Short - term rentals other than a cabin	16	1.8%
\$101 - \$200	Short - term rentals other than a cabin	14	1.5%
\$1,000 or more	Short - term rentals other than a cabin	8	0.9%
Less than \$100	Short - term rentals other than a cabin	7	0.8%
Total		908	100%

The following question was asked of respondents: Did you participate in any guided activities? All the responses are represented in the table below.

Did you participate in any guided activities?	Count	Percent
No	319	63%
Yes	186	37%
Total	505	100%



The following question was asked of respondents: How would you rate the cleanliness of the area? With answers ranging from “the area was very poorly preserved to The area was very well preserved” on a 5 point likert scale the following data was gathered:

How would you rate the cleanliness of the are a?	Count	Percent
The area was very poorly preserved	1	0%
The area was poorly preserved	3	1%
Neutral	42	8%
The area was well preserved	188	37%
The area was very well preserved	271	54%
Total	505	100%

The following question was asked of respondents: Select the following that you received information about once arriving in the Red River Gorge area. All the responses are represented in the table below.

Select the following that you received information about once arriving in the Red River Gorge area?	Count	Percent
Safe hiking practices	232	45.9%
Safe campfire practices	192	38.0%
Proper waste disposal	175	34.7%
Information about all of the events taking place during my stay	136	26.9%
Best practices for minimizing impacts on the environment (leave no trace principles)	150	29.7%
Safe canoeing/kayaking practices	129	25.5%
Safe climbing practices	115	22.8%
I did not receive any information	121	24.0%
Best practices for parking/carpooling	121	24.0%
Safe cycling practices	75	14.9%
Total	1446	N/A

The following question was asked of respondents: Is there anything you wish you knew before your trip that would have made your experience better? All the responses are represented in the table below.

Is there anything you wish you knew before your trip that would have made your experience better?	Count	Percent
No	306	61%
Yes	199	39%
Total	505	100%

As a follow-up question to individuals who answered yes, the previous question was asked and answers collected:

If yes to the previous question select from the following for options that best satisfies what you wish you knew beforehand.	Count	Percent
Information about all of the events taking place during my stay	92	18.47%
Event schedules	62	12.45%
Safe hiking practices	58	11.65%
Best practices for parking /carpooling	53	10.64%
Safe climbing practices	43	8.63%
Safe cycling practices	43	8.63%
Best practices for minimizing impacts on the environment (leave no trace principles)	40	8.03%
Proper waste disposal	37	7.43%
Safe canoeing/kayaking practices	36	7.23%
Safe campfire practices	31	6.22%
Maps	2	0.40%
Local business directory	1	0.20%
Total	498	100%

The following question was asked of respondents: Did you encounter any issues during your trip? All the responses are represented in the table below.

Did you encounter any issues during your trip?	Count	Percent
No	449	89%
Yes	56	11%
Total	505	100%

Tourist Short Answer

If respondents answered YES to the question “Did you encounter any issues during your trip?”, they were then asked to provide descriptions of those issues. See the summary below:

During their trips, visitors encountered various issues as highlighted in their responses. One recurring concern was the availability of telephone service, which seemed to be problematic for some individuals. Parking also emerged as a potential challenge, with experiences varying depending on the day, holiday, or season. Some respondents had to modify their plans due to insufficient parking, emphasizing the need for better parking facilities. Another issue mentioned was the difficulty in finding accommodations at the last minute, resulting in the need to stay in nearby Winchester. On a more positive note, many visitors expressed their enjoyment of the scenic beauty and the overall cheerful atmosphere. Several respondents recommended making preparations and guidelines in advance, emphasizing the importance of being fully prepared and anticipating unexpected situations. There were also positive remarks about the local food and the joy it brought. However, some concerns were raised regarding hikers not respecting the land or others, limited parking at trailheads, and the closure of certain trails or bridges. Additionally, a few individuals mentioned disturbances caused by noisy neighboring campers, leading to sleepless nights. Overall, these responses shed light on a range of issues encountered during trips to the area, offering valuable insights for improving visitor experiences and addressing potential challenges.

We provided a comment section that asked “What comments do you have regarding the cleanliness of the area?” that allowed respondents to provide more open-ended feedback. See the summary below:

Regarding the cleanliness of the area, visitors provided a range of comments in their responses. Some praised the cleanliness, mentioning that the area always appeared clean and well-maintained. However, a few respondents noted specific issues such as graffiti in certain spots or litter along the sides of roads and at campsites. They suggested the need for better cleanup efforts and improvements in specific areas. Some visitors highlighted the impact of increased tourism, noting that it brought both positive aspects and challenges. They mentioned the importance of educating visitors about leaving no trace and expressed a desire for more signage and education in this regard. While most respondents had positive impressions of the area's cleanliness, a few mentioned occasional instances of littering or debris left by others. Overall, there was a recognition that efforts were made to maintain cleanliness, but some areas could benefit from increased attention and better practices to ensure a consistently clean environment.

An open-ended question respondents were asked was “How do you think the local residents in Powell County could benefit from an increase in tourism in the Red River Gorge area?”. See the summary below:

An increase in tourism could bring several benefits to the local residents of Powell County. Firstly, it would lead to more tax dollars flowing into the community, allowing for better facilities and infrastructure improvements. This could include road repairs, emergency services, and other essential amenities.

The growth in tourism would also create more job opportunities for the residents. Local businesses would expand and new ventures would emerge, providing job security and income growth. Additionally, the influx of tourists would boost the local economy, generating more revenue for the county and garnering positive attention, which could result in further improvements for the area.

The increased tourism would bring about a variety of advantages. Residents would have access to a wider range of dining and shopping options, enhancing their quality of life. Furthermore, they would have the opportunity to meet people from different areas, promoting cultural exchange and fostering a sense of community. The rise in tourism could also lead to the recognition and promotion of local craftsmanship and products. The development of businesses and investments related to outdoor adventure would cater to tourists' needs while supporting the local economy.

Another important aspect is the preservation of the area's natural beauty. Residents express the need to maintain the pristine state of the Red River Gorge while capitalizing on tourism. They believe in the importance of keeping less-touched areas intact and cultivating residents' pride in their community.

Overall, an increase in tourism would bring financial benefits, job opportunities, enhanced services, and a stronger local economy to Powell County. However, it's important to note that these benefits should be balanced with the preservation of the area's natural environment and the residents' desires for a peaceful and authentic experience.

Additionally, respondents were asked "How do you think the local businesses in Powell County could benefit from an increase in tourism in the Red River Gorge area?". See the summary below:

An increase in tourism would bring several benefits to local businesses in Powell County. Firstly, it would result in more customers visiting their establishments, leading to increased sales and revenue. The higher foot traffic would provide opportunities for businesses to showcase their products or services and attract a larger customer base.

With more tourists coming to the area, local businesses would have the chance to expand and grow. The influx of visitors would create a demand for new businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and shops, providing opportunities for entrepreneurs to establish ventures and contribute to the local economy.

The financial gains from increased tourism would also enable businesses to invest in improving their services and facilities. They could expand their operations, hire additional staff, and enhance customer experiences, which would contribute to their long-term success and competitiveness.

Moreover, an increase in tourism would generate more revenue for the local community as a whole. The money spent by tourists would circulate within the county, benefiting not only businesses but also supporting services and infrastructure.

To fully capitalize on the benefits of tourism, it's important for local businesses to strike a balance between growth and preserving the natural beauty of the area. They can contribute to sustainable tourism practices by offering local products, promoting cultural experiences, and respecting the environment.

Overall, an increase in tourism would bring financial opportunities, business growth, and increased visibility to local businesses in Powell County, fostering economic development and benefiting the community as a whole.

Lastly, respondents were asked "What improvements would you suggest to enhance the tourism experience in the Red River Gorge area?". See the summary below:

To enhance the tourism experience in the Red River Gorge area, several improvements can be implemented. Firstly, developing a better tourist website with comprehensive information about attractions, accommodations, and activities would greatly assist visitors in planning their trips. Additionally, creating a few more public swimming holes and water-based activities would provide additional recreational options for tourists. Introducing a local brewery would not only add to the area's charm but also enhance the culinary experiences available to visitors. Another suggestion is to establish a water park, offering entertainment and fun for families and individuals alike. Improving activity experiences, such as guided tours and educational programs, would provide valuable insights into the region's natural beauty and cultural heritage. Adding signs, information centers, rest areas, restrooms, and dining options would enhance visitor comfort and convenience. Better road infrastructure, improved access to cabins and natural areas, and clearer maps with trail details and pictures are essential for ensuring a smooth and enjoyable experience for tourists. Moreover, strengthening the internet and Wi-Fi infrastructure would enable better connectivity for visitors. Overall, by implementing these improvements, the Red River Gorge area can further enrich the tourism experience and attract a larger number of visitors.

Residents Section

Individuals who selected “resident” as their relationship to the Red River Gorge area were directed to a different section of the survey to gauge the impacts on those individuals. Below are the results from that section.

The following question was asked: As a resident are you concerned about growing tourism activity? All the responses are represented in the table below.

As a resident are you concerned about growing tourism activity?	Count	Percent
Not sure	37	11%
Yes	208	63%
No	83	25%
Total	328	100%

The following question was asked: If yes to the previous question what are your concerns? Check all that apply. All the responses are represented in the table below.

If yes to the previous question what are your concerns? Check all that apply.	Count	Percent
Infrastructure (parking, roads, water, housing, etc)	183	56%
Increased cost of living	176	54%
Environmental sustainability	171	52%
Pressure on local governments to prioritize tourism development over traditional community needs	140	43%
Changes in the character of the community	131	40%
Higher prices on goods and services	118	36%
Economic sustainability	106	32%
Inability to meet emergency response needs	101	31%
Increased crime	71	22%
Total	1197	N/A

The following question was asked: What county do you live in? All the responses are represented in the table below.

What county do you live in?	Count	Percent
Powell County	207	63%
Other county nearby	28	9%
Wolfe County	49	15%
Lee County	31	9%
Menifee County	12	4%
Total	327	100%

The following question was asked: How long have you lived in the area? (in years). All the responses are represented in the table below.

How long have you lived in the area? (In years)	Count	Percent
1 Year	2	0.61%
2 Years	8	2.45%
3 Years	14	4.28%
4 Years	8	2.45%
5 Years	12	3.67%
6 Years	10	3.06%
7 Years	3	0.92%
8 Years	9	2.75%
9 Years	12	3.67%
0-2 Years	7	2.14%
10 or more	242	74.01%
Total	327	100%

The following question was asked: As a resident, what do you wish tourist/visitors knew about the area prior to visiting? All the responses are represented in the table below.

As a resident, what do you wish tourist/visitors knew about the area prior to visiting?	Count	Percent
Safe campfire practices	186	57%
Proper waste disposal	184	56%
Safe hiking practices	177	54%
Best practices for minimizing impacts on the environment (leave no trace principles)	174	53%
Safe climbing practices	143	44%
Best practices for parking/carpooling	134	41%
Safe canoeing/kayaking practices	118	36%
Information about all of the events taking place during my stay	110	34%
Event schedules	49	15%
Total	1275	N/A

*it should be noted that safe campfire practices was selected by 57% of respondents but may not be generally reflective due to timing of the survey. At the onset of the survey, a wildfire was present in the Red River Gorge area.

Additionally, more than half of survey respondents selected safe campfire practices, proper waste disposal, safe hiking practices, and best practices for minimizing impacts on the environment (leave no trace principles).

Respondents were asked the following question: **How often do you eat at local restaurants?** Select the most appropriate option. All the responses are represented in the table below.

How often do you eat at local restaurants? Select the most appropriate option.	Count	Percent
Frequently (once a week)	123	38%
Occasionally (once a month)	118	36%
Very frequently (more than once a week)	54	17%
Rarely (less than once a month)	30	9%
Never	1	0%
Total	326	100%

Business Owner Section

Individuals who selected “Business Owner” as their relationship to the Red River Gorge area were directed to a different section of the survey to gauge their engagement with the Powell County Tourism Commission and gather other pertinent information. Below are the results from that section.

The following question was asked: As a local business owner do you consider yourself to be engaged with the Powell County Tourism Commission? All the responses are represented in the table below.

As a local business owner do you consider yourself to be engaged with the Powell County Tourism Commission?	Count	Percent
Yes	25	60%
No	8	20%
Not sure	8	20%
Total	41	100%

The following question was asked: As a local business owner do you benefit from the Powell County Tourism Commission? All the responses are represented in the table below.

As a local business owner do you benefit from the Powell County Tourism Commission?	Count	Percent
Yes	30	73%
No	6	15%
Not sure	5	12%
Total	41	100%

The following question was asked: As a local business owner select from the following on how you market your business. Select all that apply. All the responses are represented in the table below.

As a local business owner select from the following on how you market your business. Select all that apply	Count	Percent
Social media (Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok, etc)	24	59%
My business is listed in an app (vrbo, Airbnb, etc)	16	39%
Through the tourism commission	18	44%
Word of mouth	26	63%
Newspaper	10	24%
Website	18	44%
Radio	3	7%
Billboards	3	7%
Total	100%	N/A

The following question was asked: How long has your business been in operation? All the responses are represented in the table below.

How long has your business been in operation?	Count	Percent
Less than 1 year	1	2%
1-3 years	16	39%
3-5 years	12	29%
5-10 years	6	15%
More than 10 years	6	15%
Total	41	100%

It is worth noting that the majority (71%) of business owners indicated that their business is less than 5 years old. The most frequent response was that the business owner had been in operation for 1-3 years and the least frequent response was that the business had been in operation less than a year. It is possible that this is reflective of multiple factors including increased property prices/start-up costs, Covid-19 related pandemic downturns, or other factors. More research would have to be completed to evaluate this. Additionally, future data gathering could demonstrate the long-term viability if more business advance in years and are counted in a longer standing category.

The following question was asked: In what County does your business operate? All the responses are represented in the table below.

In what County does your business operate?	Count	Percent
Lee County	8	20%
Meniffee County	4	10%
Powell County	23	56%
Wolfe County	6	15%
Total	41	100%

The following question was asked: What do you consider to be the greatest strength of your business? All the responses are represented in the table below.

What do you consider to be the greatest strength of your business?	Count	Percent
Strong brand or reputation	15	38%
Location and accessibility	7	18%
Unique products or services	6	15%
Strong customer base/loyalty	4	10%
Experienced and skilled employees	4	10%
All of the above	3	8%
Total	39	100%

The following question was asked: What do you consider to be the biggest opportunity for your business in the area? All the responses are represented in the table below.

What do you consider to be the biggest opportunity for your business in the area?	Count	Percent
Growth in tourism	18	44%
Increasing demand for your products or services	22	54%
Emerging trends or technologies	13	32%
Changes in local regulations or policies that benefit your businesses	3	7%
Modified permit challenges with the USFS	1	2%
Total	57	N/A

The following question was asked: What do you see as the greatest threat to your business in the area? All the responses are represented in the table below.

What do you see as the greatest threat to your business in the area?	Count	Percent
Increased competition from new or existing businesses	6	12.50%
Economic downturn or recession	10	20.83%
Natural disaster or other unforeseen event	7	14.58%
Crime or safety concerns	6	12.50%
employee procurement and retention	6	12.50%
Seasonality of the area	2	4.17%
Other	11	22.92%
Total	48	100%

Business owners who selected "Other" were able to enter a short text response. Some of those answers are described below.

Respondents described a lack of regulation, taxes, fees, and construction costs. Additionally, Business Owners described the increase in property prices and changing of tourist demographics.

Secondary Data Source Research

The economic impact study conducted by EKU's Division of Regional Economic Assessment and Modeling (DREAM) focused on the expenditures of climbers in the Red River Gorge climbing region. The findings revealed that climbers visiting the area contribute approximately \$8.7 million annually to the local economy, with over 102,000 climber visits recorded each year.

On average, climbers spend around \$74 per person per trip, with additional expenses ranging from \$5 to \$40 for lodging. These expenditures support approximately \$2.6 million in local wages and sustain an estimated 104 jobs annually.

The study also highlighted the responsible behavior of Red River Gorge climbers, as they demonstrate a high awareness of Leave No Trace principles, minimizing their impact on natural areas. Furthermore, the climbers surveyed were well-educated, with 44% holding a bachelor's degree and an additional 40% holding advanced degrees.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated closures in 2020, climbing visitation adapted by extending into the summer season and exploring less-frequented areas. However, the overall annual visitation remained unchanged.

In addition to climbing, many climbers engage in other activities during their visits to the Red River Gorge. Approximately 67% of respondents reported going on a day hike, while 39% utilized paid developed camping. Sightseeing natural features, dispersed camping, visiting wineries/breweries, overnight hikes, and driving for pleasure were also mentioned by climbers.

It's worth noting that climbers rarely camp at climbing areas, preferring established campgrounds or dispersed camping available throughout the Daniel Boone National Forest (DBNF). The study estimated that approximately 56,000 climber vehicles are parked in climbing area parking lots each year, with an average of 1.8 climbers per vehicle.

Regarding lodging expenditures, climbers typically spend \$8 per trip when camping, \$40 when renting cabins or homes, and \$5 when staying at hotels. The study found that around 80% of overnight climbing visitors utilize some form of camping, 5% utilize hotels/lodges, and 15% utilize cabins/rental homes as lodging options.

In terms of other expenses, climbers spend approximately \$20 on gasoline per visit, \$3 at fast food restaurants, \$26 at dine-in restaurants, \$3 on food from gas stations and convenience stores, and \$11 on groceries at local stores and farmer markets. Climbers also allocate around \$3 for general retail purchases and \$7 per trip on climbing gear.

While guides, shuttles, and rental gear options exist in the Red River Gorge, they are rarely used by climbers. Parking is conveniently located near climbing areas, and climbers often share or reuse gear rather than opting for rentals. Guiding services are more commonly utilized by first-time or infrequent visitors to the Red River Gorge.

These findings provide valuable insights into the economic impact of climbers in the Red River Gorge region, shedding light on their expenditures and behaviors during their visits.

According to a study conducted by Red River Economic Development, LLC, with the prime consultant team of Stantec (Bucher et al., 2021), Eastern Kentucky is well served by outdoor recreation activities. The study examined the existing transportation network and broadband infrastructure in the four counties surrounding the Red River Gorge area (Bucher et al., 2021). Data for the study was collected from various sources, including the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, Federal Highway Administration, and aerial photography (Bucher et al., 2021).

The study classified the roadway systems in the area based on their level of mobility and connectivity, which helps determine jurisdictional responsibility, design standards, and future needs (Bucher et al., 2021). It found that all roadway segments in the area operate under their intended design capacity (Bucher et al., 2021). However, congestion has been observed at Nada Tunnel along KY 77, which provides access to many Red River Gorge canyons (Bucher et al., 2021). To address this issue, the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet is conducting a planning study to determine the effectiveness of installing traffic lights on each end of the tunnel to regulate traffic flow (Bucher et al., 2021).

Regarding broadband infrastructure, the study revealed that existing fiber lines are primarily located along main corridors such as the Bert T. Combs Mountain Parkway (Bucher et al., 2021). However, significant infrastructure upgrades may be necessary to provide service to areas without coverage (Bucher et al., 2021). Wireless service is available throughout most of the study area, although some zones may have limited or no coverage due to the mountainous topography (Bucher et al., 2021).

The study also highlighted the presence of endangered and threatened species in the study area, including bats, darters, mussels, and various bird species (Bucher et al., 2021). Protecting these species and their habitats is an important consideration in the planning and development process (Bucher et al., 2021).

Additionally, the overview of millennial travel preferences and trends suggests that millennials, born between 1980 and 2000, have a significant impact on the travel industry due to their large population size and increasing spending power (Bucher et al., 2021). They prioritize travel experiences and are more travel-conscious than previous generations (Bucher et al., 2021). Their preferences align well with the offerings of the Red River Gorge area, as they prefer both international and domestic travel, with a strong focus on shorter domestic trips throughout the year (Bucher et al., 2021).

Millennials are often pioneer travelers, seeking unique and authentic experiences in less touristy destinations, and they prefer off-the-beaten-path adventures (Bucher et al., 2021). They also blend work and leisure, frequently adding leisure time to business trips (Bucher et al., 2021). Safety is the most important destination characteristic for millennials, followed by value for money, local food, climate, and adventure experiences (Bucher et al., 2021). They prioritize experiences over physical items and are willing to spend on food and beverage experiences, events/festivals, and adventure activities during their travels (Bucher et al., 2021).

On the other hand, baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, are wealthier, typically childless, and have more leisure time due to retirement (Bucher et al., 2021). They prioritize relaxation and rejuvenation during travel and tend to take more trips than other demographic segments (Bucher et al., 2021). While they mostly prefer domestic travel, there is an opportunity for the Red River Gorge Resort to attract those who prefer domestic vacations (Bucher et al., 2021).

Understanding the preferences and motivations of millennials and baby boomers can guide the development of travel experiences and offerings in the Red River Gorge area to cater to these key demographic segments (Bucher et al., 2021).

References:

- Red River Economic Development, LLC. (2020, July 27). Red River Gorge Preliminary Analysis of Opportunities. Retrieved from https://rrgunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/RRED_RRG_Preliminary_Analysis_Opportunities_rdc_d_08062020.pdf
- Maples, J. N., & Bradley, M. (2020). Economic impact of rock climbing in Kentucky's Red River Gorge. Richmond, KY: Eastern Kentucky University, Division of Regional Economic Assessment and Modeling (DREAM).