

# Resident Sentiment of Tourism

Wrangell 2025

## Project Mission

To protect destinations for future generations of visitors and residents.

# Project Overview

## Why The Research

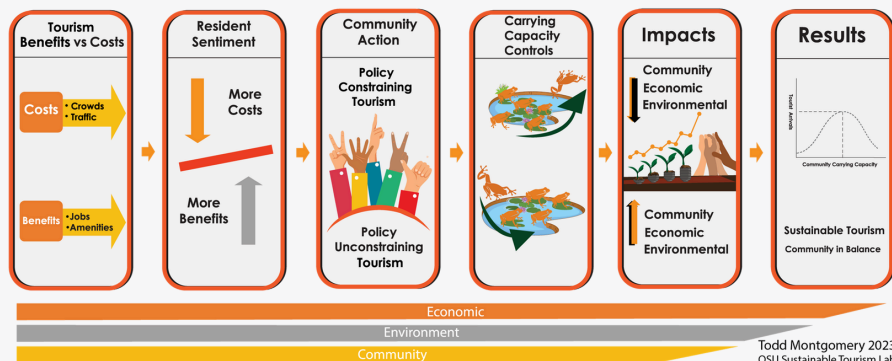
Communities around the world have grappled with tourism—its positive and negative impacts—for years. For many, it serves as the primary economic driver, meeting the basic needs of community members. However, in other destinations, the cost-benefit balance of tourism is less clear.

In the wake of the pandemic, communities are reassessing their relationship with tourism, exploring how to make the industry sustainable from economic, social, and environmental perspectives.

The goal of the OSU Sustainable Tourism Lab is to support these efforts by providing applied research, objective information, and best practices.

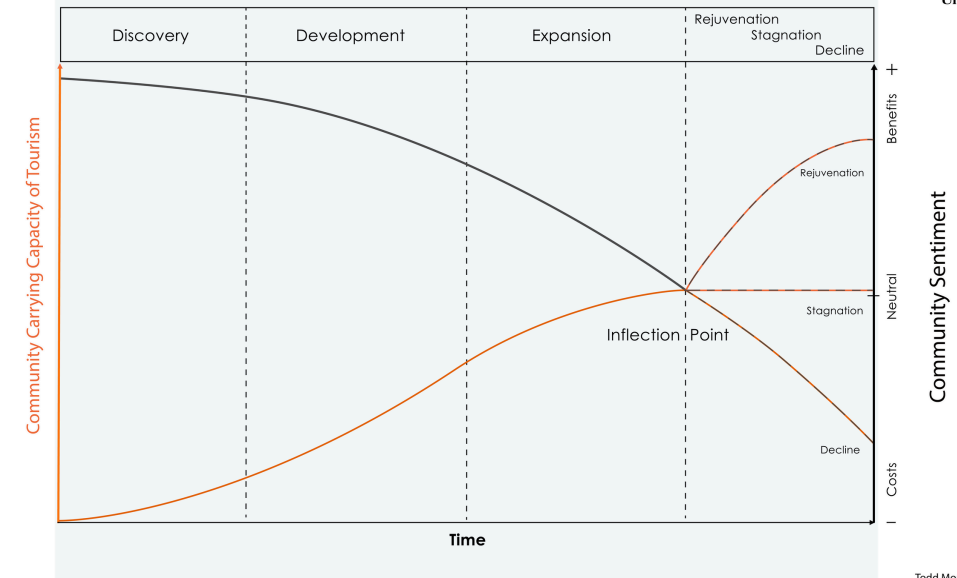
## Sustainable Tourism

Community Carrying Capacity Model



## Destination Lifecycle

Community Sentiment Impact



## Project Overview

Our research has shown a strong relationship between a destination's lifecycle stage and the sentiment levels within its community. Additionally, we've found that community sentiment levels influence the community carrying capacity of the destination.

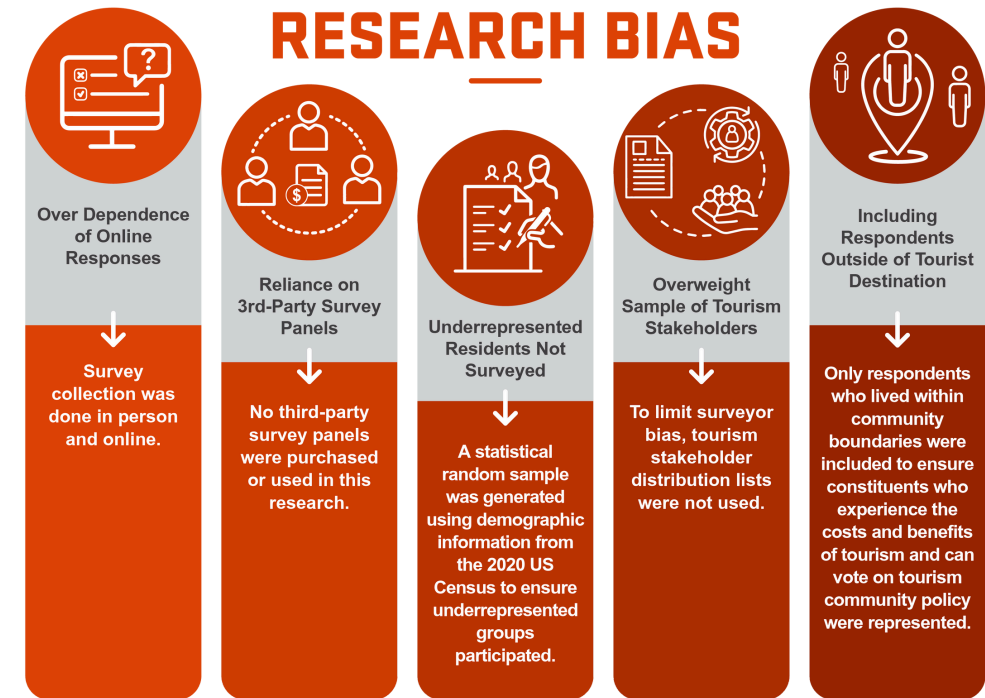
When a community's sentiment falls below neutral, it often prompts action—directly or indirectly—through political entities to reduce the area's overall carrying capacity. This may manifest as restrictions on visitor numbers, the implementation of policies aimed at preserving local resources, or changes to infrastructure planning. Such actions are typically driven by a desire to protect the community's quality of life and mitigate negative impacts on the environment and local culture.



# Methodology



## ADDRESSING RESEARCH BIAS



### Methodology

During our research, we have reviewed hundreds of studies conducted worldwide. The quality of these surveys varied greatly, with several common gaps identified, including:

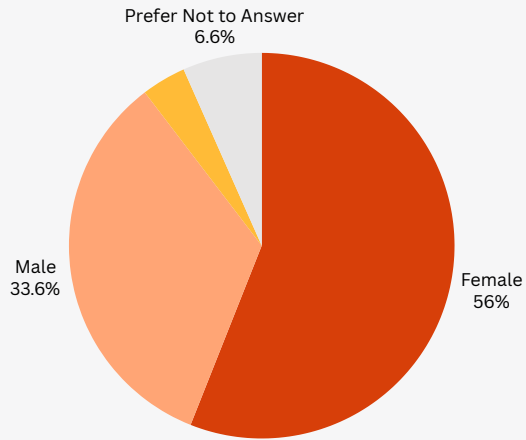
- Were underrepresented groups included in the study?
- Was the sample statistically representative of the community?
- Were non-tourism stakeholders equally represented?
- Were the studies one-off efforts, or were follow-up studies conducted to track changes over time?

Our report ensures that community-specific survey data were statistically representative of the entire population in question. To amplify the voices of all community members, we made extensive efforts to engage people where they were, conducting surveys both in person and online. After collecting the initial data, we identified and performed outreach to groups underrepresented in our sample. Despite these efforts, we recognized that more rigorous methods were needed to ensure fairness and accuracy.

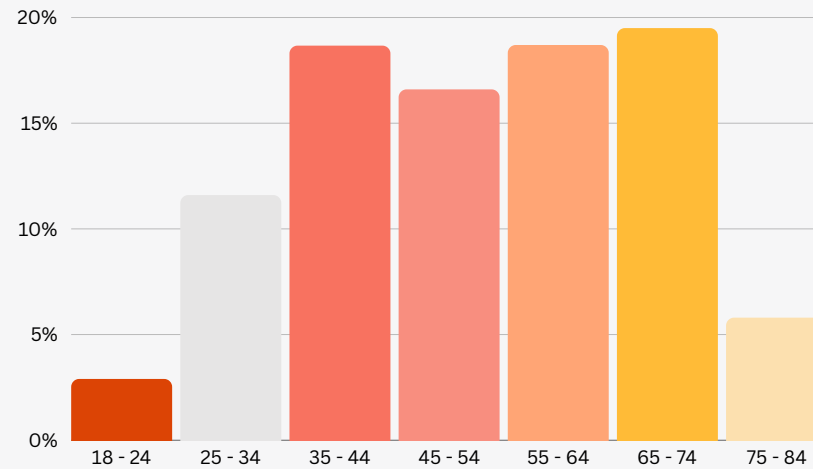
To meet this challenge, we employed stratified random sampling, followed by a downsampling technique to align category percentages with census data. Downsampling involves repeatedly drawing random samples—5,000 times in our case—as each random sample from the original dataset can yield different results. This approach allowed us to account for variability and ensure a balanced representation. The histograms in this report depict this variability, forming a bell curve that highlights the importance of repeated sampling in achieving reliable outcomes.

# Sample Demographics

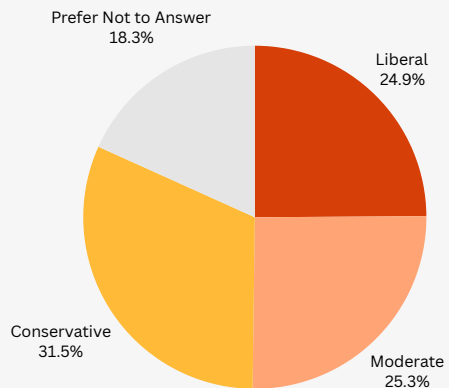
Gender



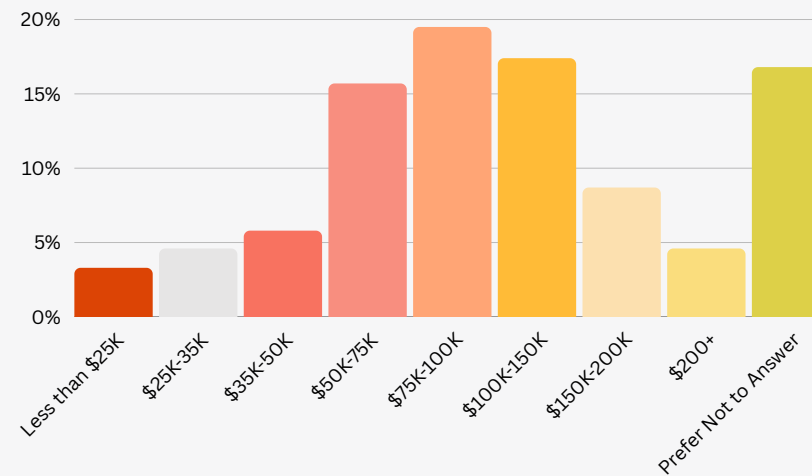
Age



Political Beliefs



Income



## Demographics

In all our projects, we strive to collect a representative sample grounded in U.S. Census data. For Wrangell—a community of approximately 2,000 residents—our sample of 241 survey responses offered a strong foundation, even prior to applying stratified random sampling techniques. The high response rate relative to the town’s population underscores the community’s engagement and lends additional credibility to the findings. This strong participation also enhances our ability to draw meaningful conclusions about local attitudes and priorities.

Gender representation in the sample leaned slightly female. Age and income distributions formed a balanced bell curve, with most respondents falling into mid-range categories.

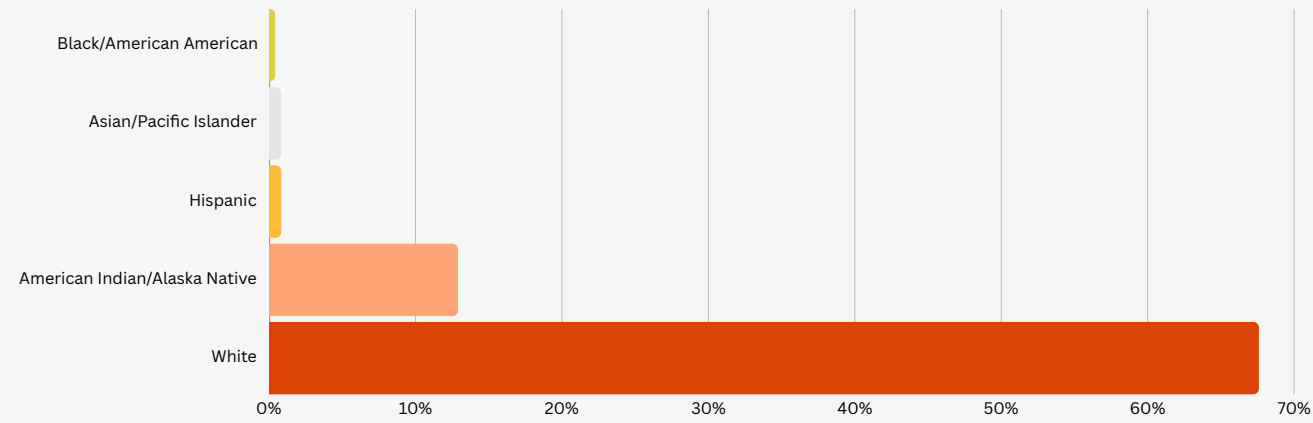
The sample also captured key aspects of Wrangell’s unique demographic profile, including a high proportion of long-term residents. Notably, most participants did not work in the hospitality sector, reducing the potential for bias toward tourism-related perspectives. The majority of respondents also identified as white.

This well-rounded dataset provided a reliable basis for understanding local sentiment, ensuring our analysis accurately reflects the views and dynamics of Wrangell’s community.

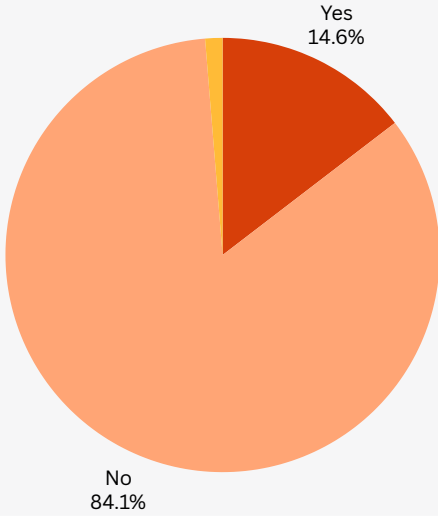


# Sample Demographics

Ethnicity



Employed in Hospitality



Length of Residency



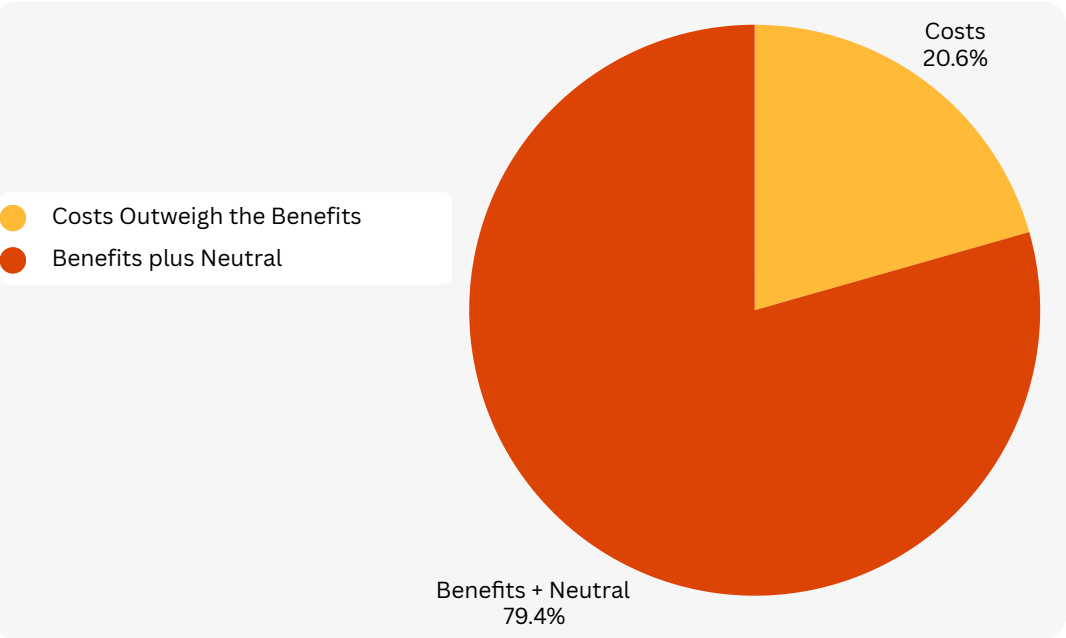
# Resident KPI: Costs vs Benefits

## Costs Vs Benefits

As part of our Carrying Capacity Model, one of the most insightful and widely adopted measures of community sentiment is the “Costs vs. Benefits” question. This question cuts to the core of how residents weigh tourism’s impact—do the positives outweigh the negatives?

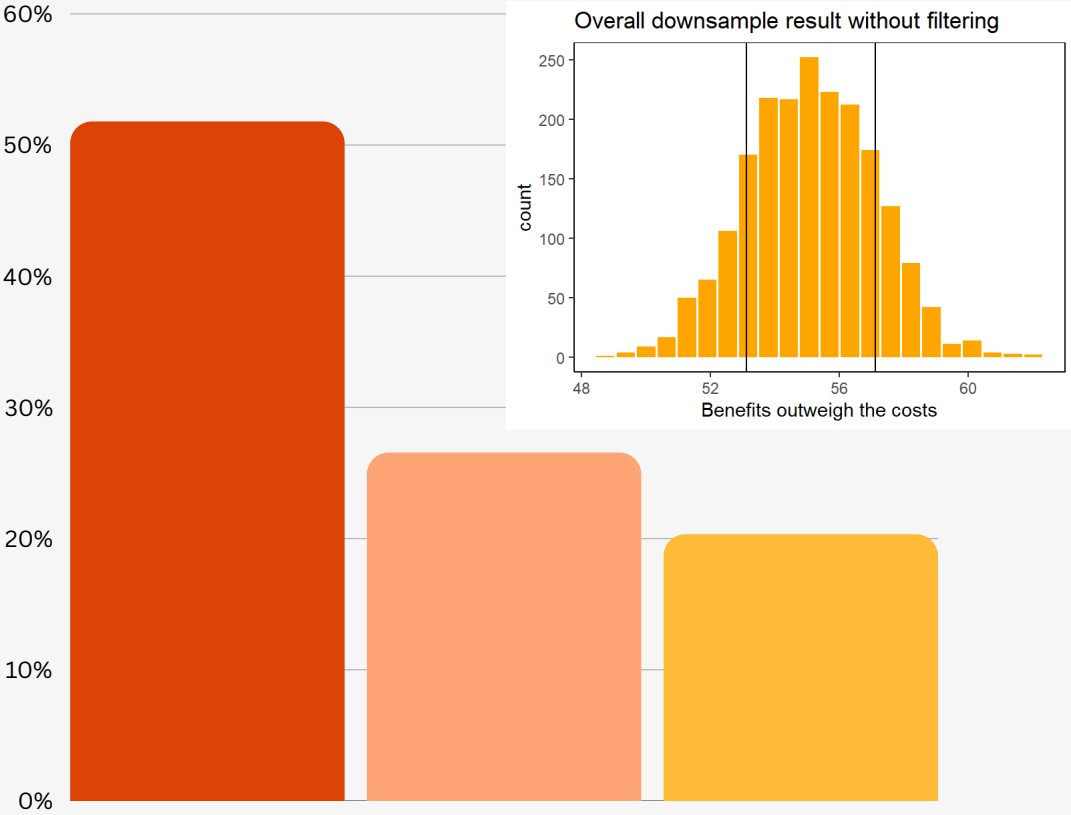
In Wrangell, about 52% of respondents believe tourism brings more benefits than costs, while 20% feel the opposite—that the costs are too high relative to the benefits.

These results are later benchmarked against other destinations to provide context and reveal how Wrangell stacks up. Overall, the data suggests a relatively healthy sentiment toward tourism. Still, without thoughtful planning and management, public opinion could shift—potentially resulting in policies that limit tourism growth down the line.



## Wrangell 2025

- Benefits Outweigh the Costs
- Neutral: Equal Amount of Benefits and Costs
- Costs Outweigh the Benefits



In general, do you feel the benefits of tourism outweigh the costs or the costs of tourism outweigh the benefits of tourism?

# Age & Residency

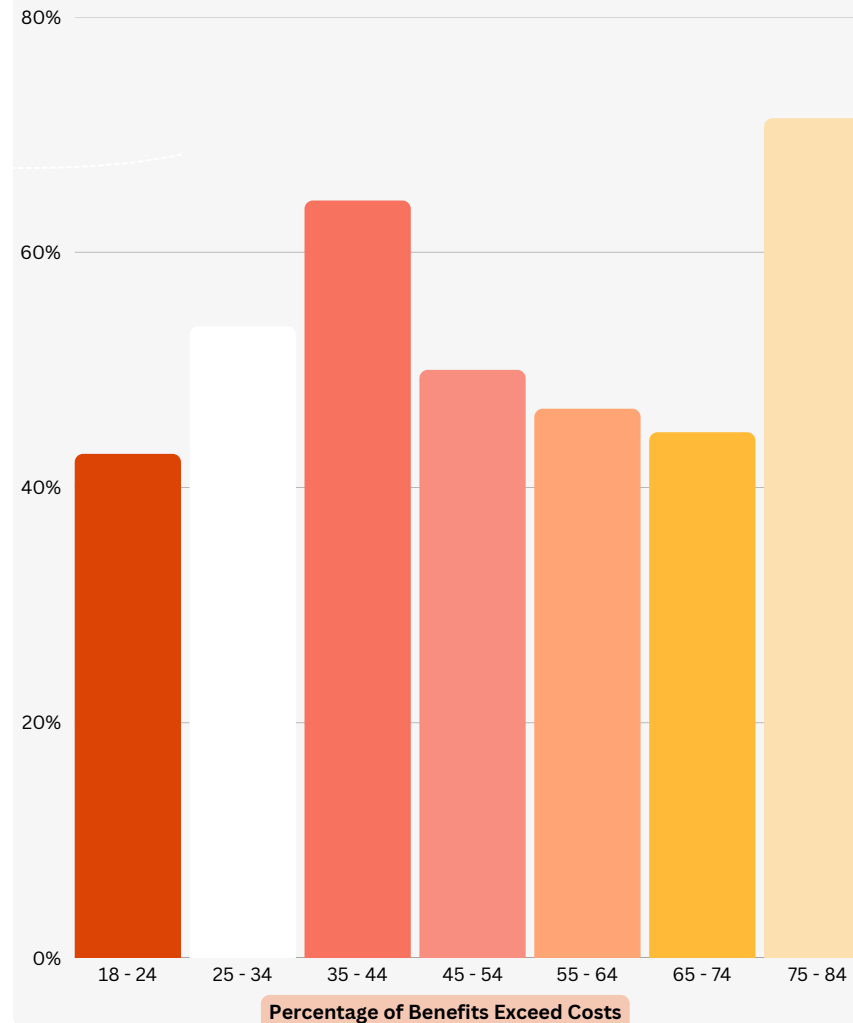
## Age & Residency Benefits vs Costs

In a departure from trends seen in many other destinations, older residents in Wrangell view tourism more favorably than their younger counterparts. This may reflect the community's strong base of long-term residents who are well established and continue to benefit from tourism's economic contributions.

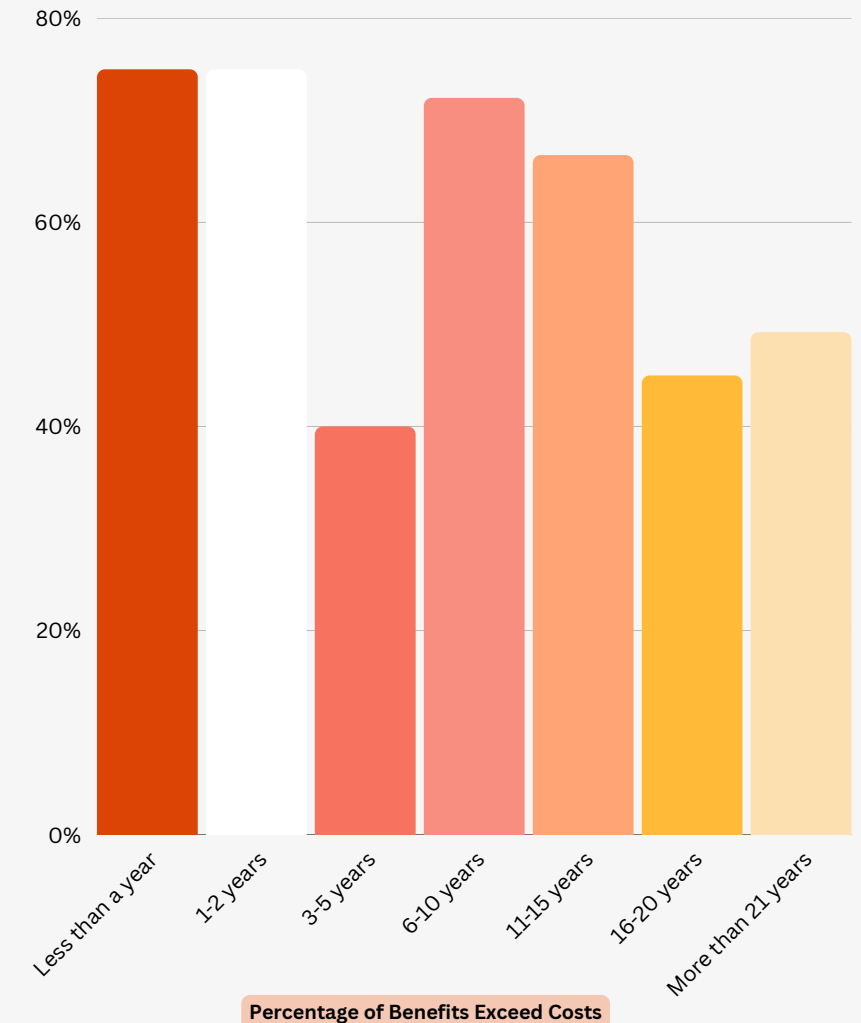
Conversely, newer residents—those who have lived in Wrangell for a shorter time—also report high levels of perceived benefit. This likely stems from choosing to move to an active tourist destination, drawn by its opportunities and amenities tied to the tourism economy.

What makes Wrangell especially interesting is how this pattern diverges from what we typically see elsewhere. In many places, longtime residents tend to express much greater skepticism, often yearning for the quieter, pre-tourism version of their community. Having witnessed substantial change over time, they may be more cautious about the pace and direction of tourism growth.

### Perceptions of Tourism by Age Group

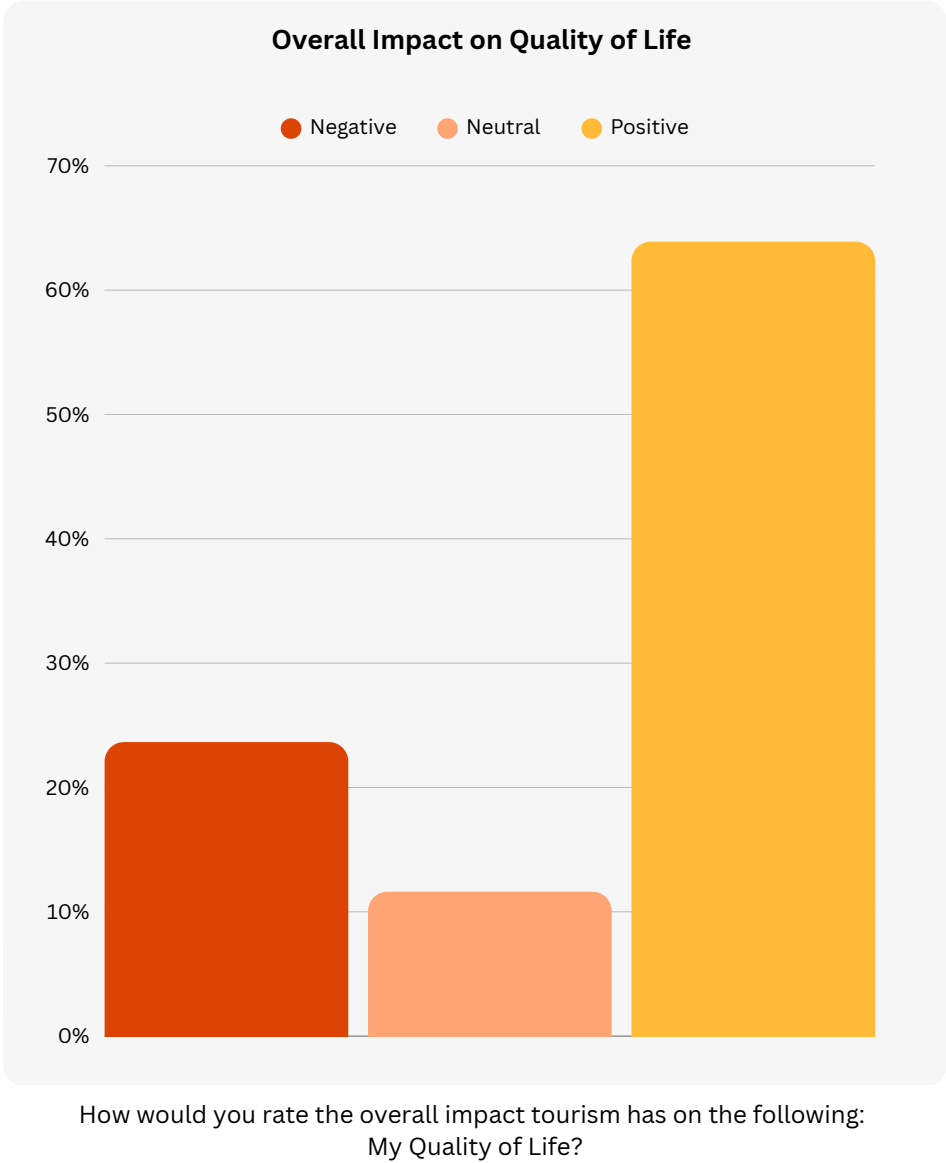


### Perceptions of Tourism by Length of Residency





# Resident KPI: Quality of Life

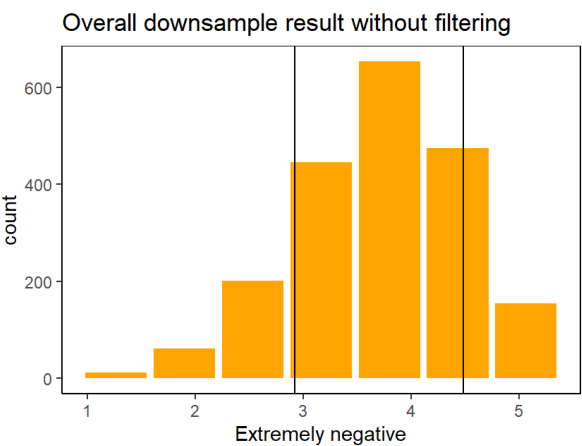
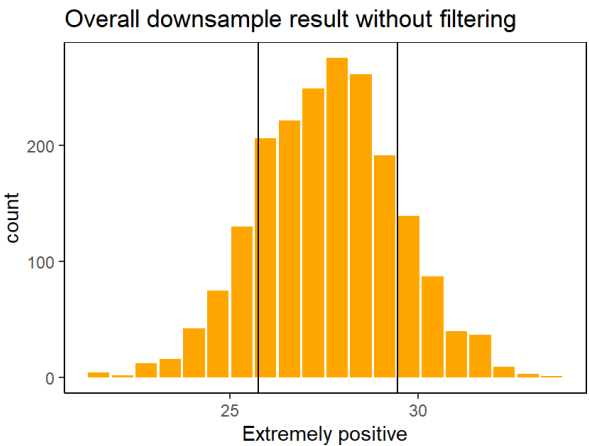


## Quality of Life

Our second key indicator for assessing tourism’s impact is its effect on residents’ quality of life. Unlike broader economic or community-wide measures, this metric serves as an early warning signal—often predicting future shifts in how residents weigh tourism’s overall costs and benefits unless efforts are made to address negative impacts and amplify the positives.

In Wrangell, 64% of residents say tourism improves their quality of life, while about 24% report a negative impact. These numbers tend to be less favorable than responses to the "Costs vs. Benefits" question, likely because quality of life taps into how tourism affects individuals on a personal level, rather than its broader community value.

The takeaway is clear: sustaining positive sentiment requires a deliberate balance—ensuring tourism supports, rather than erodes, the day-to-day experience of local residents. Without that, support for tourism can quickly erode over time.



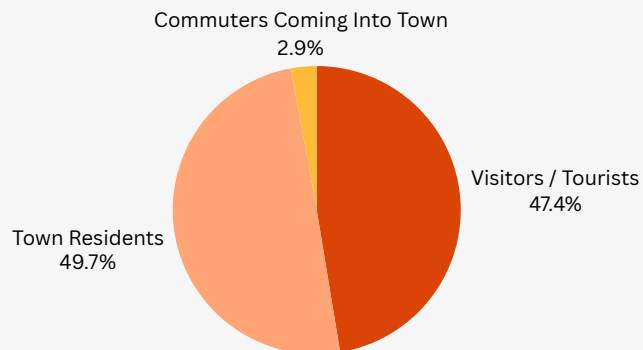
# Common Costs of Tourism

## Common Tourism Costs

Globally, vacation rentals, traffic, overcrowding, and environmental degradation are among the most commonly cited costs of tourism. In Wrangell, resident concerns mirror broader trends when it comes to traffic and environmental impacts.

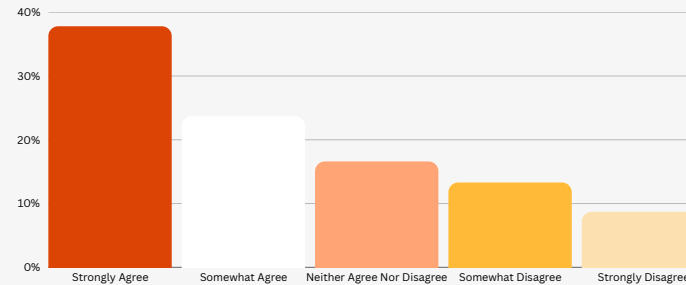
However, perceptions of vacation rentals stand out—generally viewed in a more favorable light compared to many other destinations. This divergence may be linked to Wrangell’s cruise-centric, day-trip tourism model, where fewer visitors stay overnight, reducing pressure on local housing. While this pattern is noteworthy, it warrants further investigation to better understand the underlying dynamics.

Source of Traffic



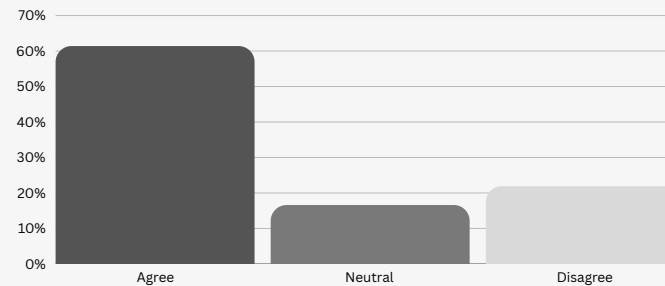
Who contributes most to traffic congestion in your town?

## Perceptions of Vacation Rentals



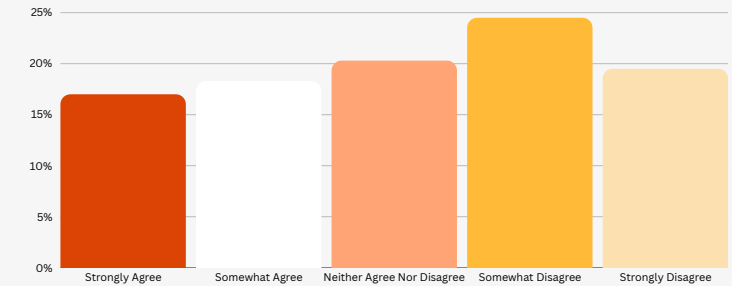
Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about short term rentals (i.e.: Airbnb, VRBO) in your town? Vacation rentals are a positive addition to our town.

## Perceptions of Vacation Rentals



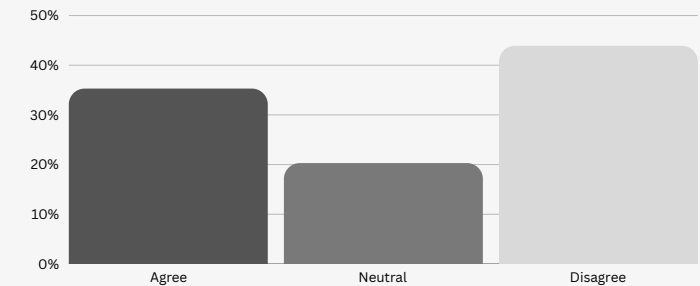
Perception of Vacation Rentals

## Perception of Impact on the Environment



Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about tourism and the environment? Tourism causes more positive environmental effects than negative ones.

## Perception of Impact on the Environment



Perception of Tourism Impact on the Environment

# Priority for Tourism Tax Revenue

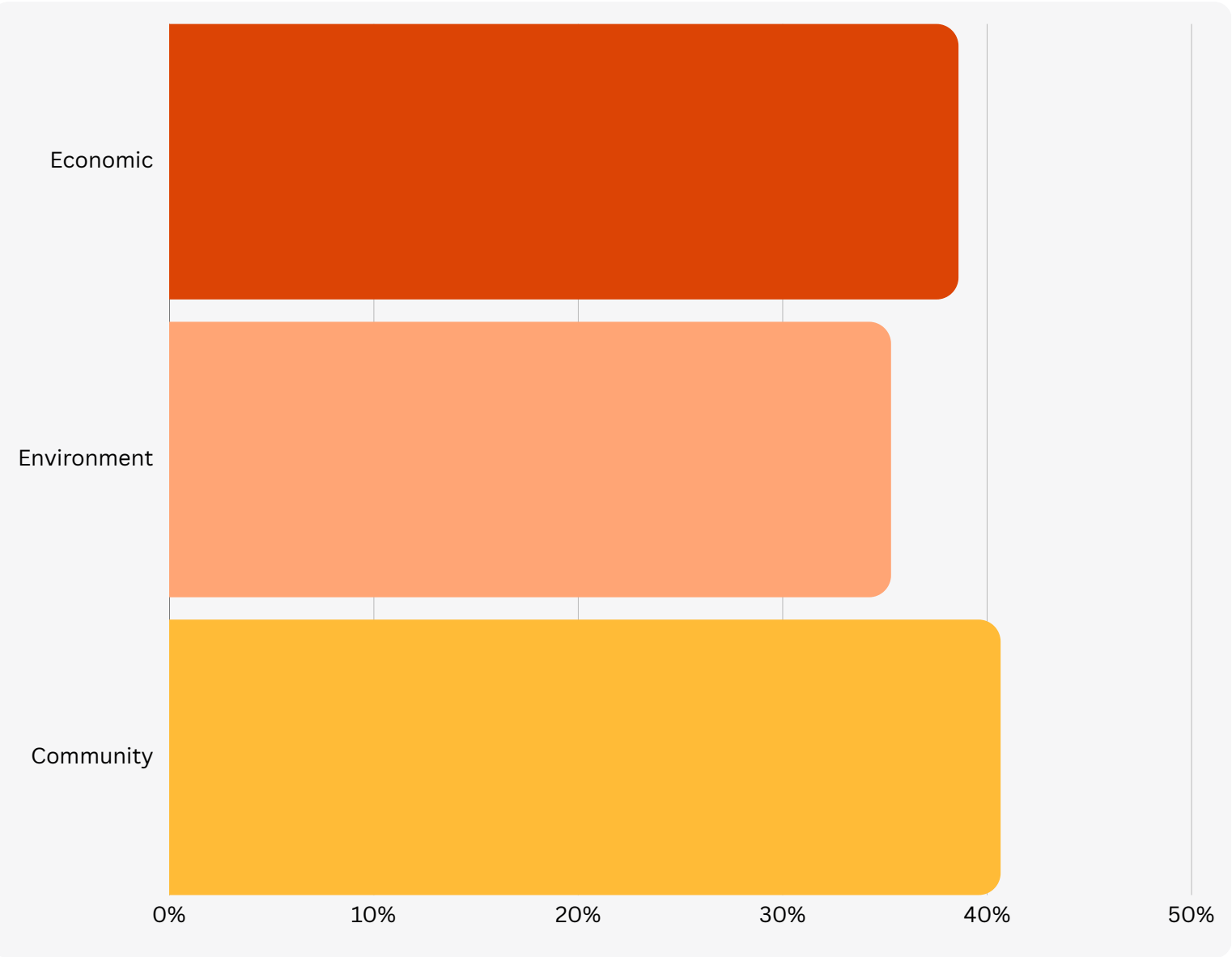
## Tax Revenue Priorities

Wrangell residents voiced opinions on how tourism tax revenue should be spent, with an emphasis on projects that directly benefit the community. While environmental initiatives and economic development also received notable support, they trailed slightly behind community-focused investments.

As we've observed in many destinations, the definition of "community benefit" can vary widely. For some, it means upgrading public infrastructure like parks, roads, or waterfronts. For others, it may involve support for social services, education, or the preservation of local culture and heritage.

A key takeaway from this data is the importance of digging deeper into what specific types of community projects residents prioritize. Clarifying these preferences can help ensure that funding decisions truly reflect the community's shared vision. Just as importantly, involving residents in these conversations can foster a greater sense of ownership, increase transparency, and ultimately lead to more successful and sustainable project outcomes.

Tourist destinations often have a lodging tax (aka a tax on tourists) for anyone staying in a hotel, vacation rental, or other short-term lodging. Please rank how you feel tax revenue should be reinvested in your town.





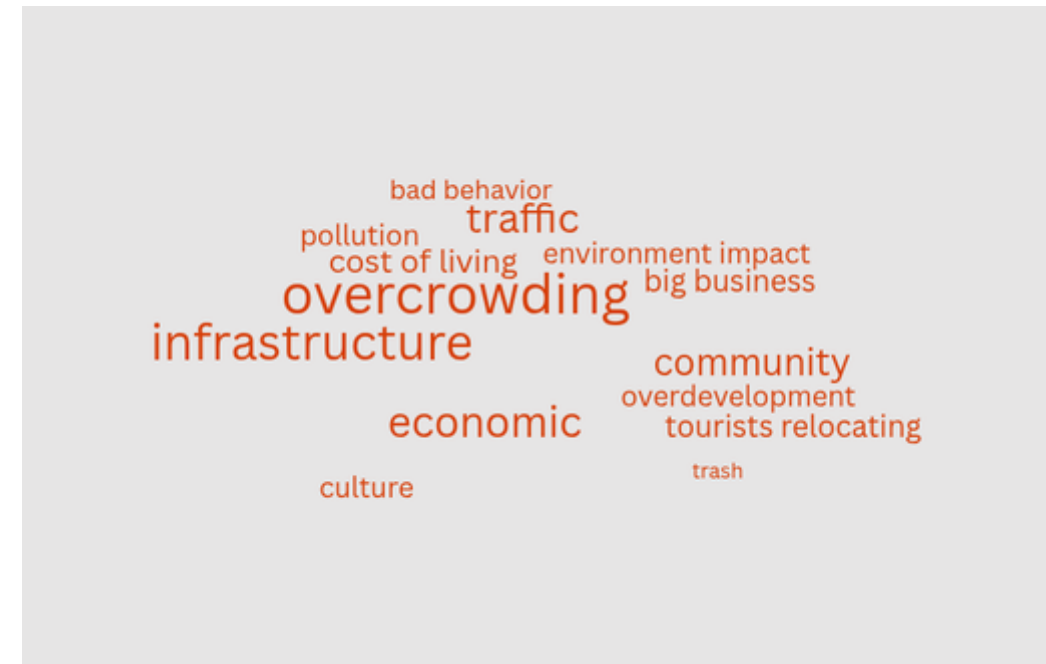
# Biggest Costs & Benefits

What are the biggest benefits of tourism?



In a few words, what is the biggest benefit of tourism to your town?

What are the biggest costs of tourism?



In a few words, what is the biggest cost of tourism to your town?

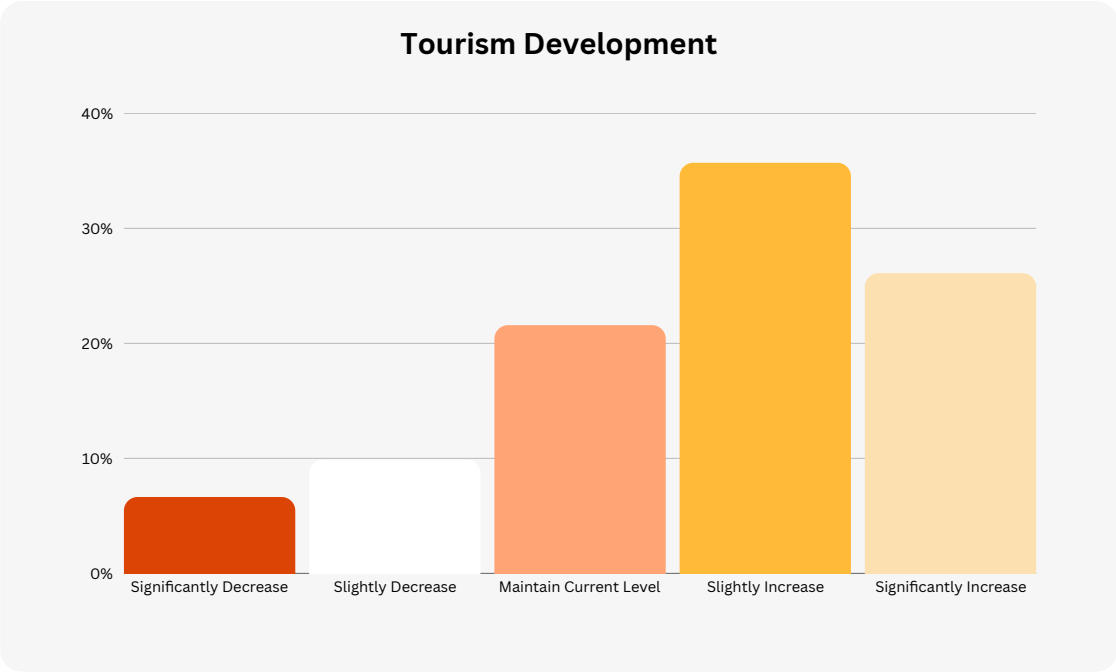
## Perceived Costs & Benefits of Tourism

Around the world, communities tend to view tourism primarily through an economic lens—and Wrangell is no exception. Residents most frequently cited economic benefits such as tax revenue, job creation, and increased local spending as the key advantages of tourism.

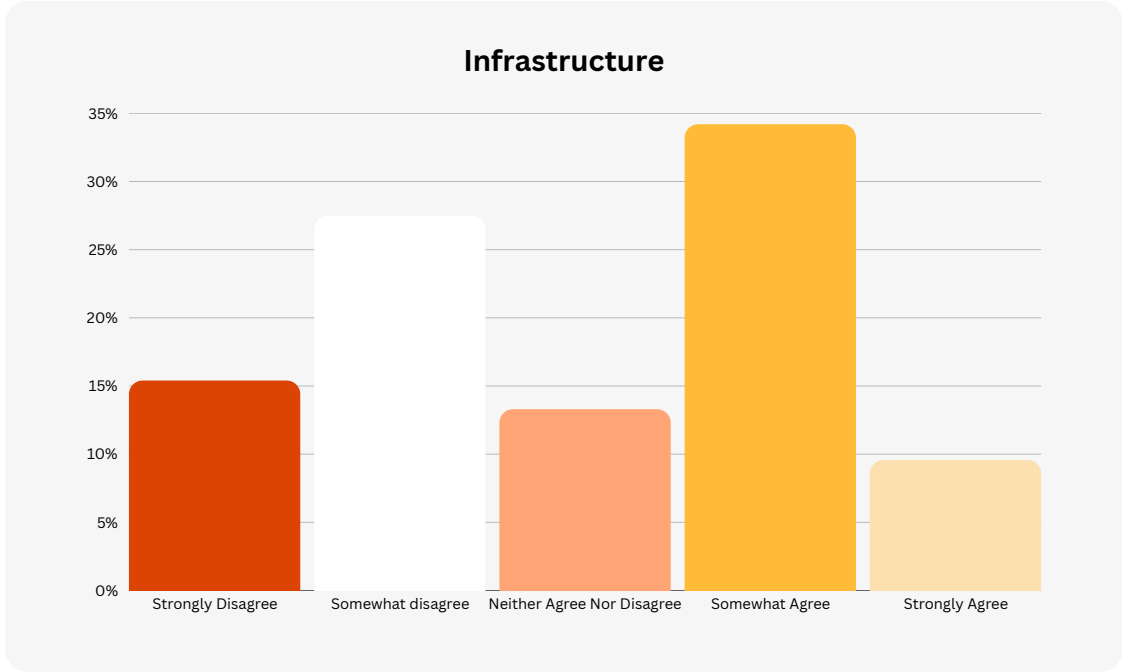
When it comes to perceived costs, Wrangell showed both alignment and divergence from broader trends. While concerns about community, infrastructure, and traffic echoed those seen in other destinations, Wrangell stood out as only the second destination in our research to rank overcrowding as the top concern. This finding contrasts with nearby Skagway, where cost-related concerns leaned more heavily toward community strain and affordability.

Upcoming sections on tourism development and greenspace will offer deeper insight into how these concerns connect to residents' broader views on quality of life.

# Positive & Negative Impacts of Tourism



Do you support more or less tourism development in our town?



Do you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
The current infrastructure and visitor services can support the volume of tourism in my town?

## Tourism Development & Infrastructure

In 2024, the OSU Sustainable Tourism Lab introduced new questions exploring resident views on tourism development and existing infrastructure. Wrangell residents expressed a clear preference for expanding tourism development—one of the strongest pro-development sentiments recorded across all destinations in the study. This is particularly noteworthy given Wrangell’s current stage in the tourism lifecycle, where communities often become more cautious about growth.

Perceptions of infrastructure were more mixed. A majority of residents felt the existing infrastructure could adequately support current tourist volumes. This stands out, as most destinations typically show broad support for infrastructure expansion. Wrangell’s response suggests a degree of confidence in current capacity, or perhaps a measured view of the scale of tourism growth needed.

# Wrangell Greenspaces

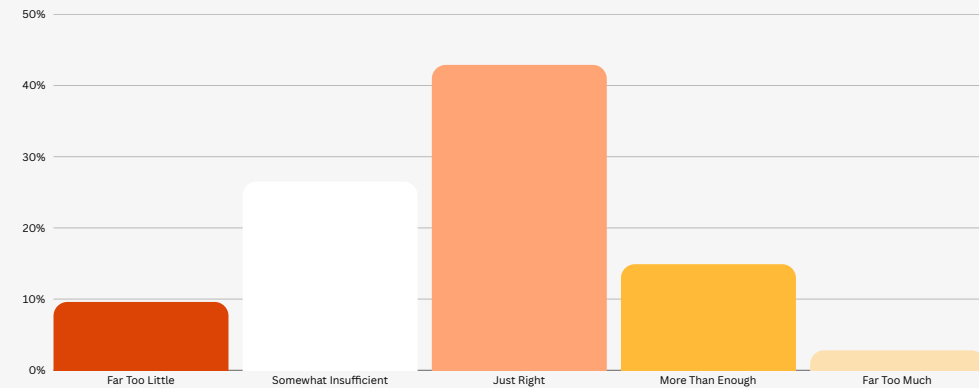
## Greenspace

Wrangell residents' views on greenspace reflect a balanced and measured approach, closely aligning with sentiment in other Alaskan cruise destinations. Unlike many global tourism hotspots—where the lack of accessible greenspace is considered a major cost of tourism and a growing source of resident frustration—Wrangell has not yet reached a critical threshold in this regard. This suggests that while concerns exist, they are not as acute as in more densely developed destinations.

The open-ended comments section of the survey adds valuable context to this finding. Many residents expressed a desire for more parks, gardens, and natural gathering spaces that could serve both locals and visitors. A recurring theme was the call for expanded waterfront development, particularly through the creation of additional trails and recreational areas that showcase Wrangell's natural assets while promoting health, accessibility, and tourism appeal.

In addition, respondents highlighted the need for further beautification of the downtown core. Suggestions included landscaping, public art, and cleaner, more welcoming streetscapes—elements that could enhance the visitor experience while also fostering local pride. These responses point to a community that values its natural environment and recognizes the opportunity to make strategic, low-impact improvements that support both resident well-being and tourism development.

Green Space



What is your opinion on the current amount of green space in our town?

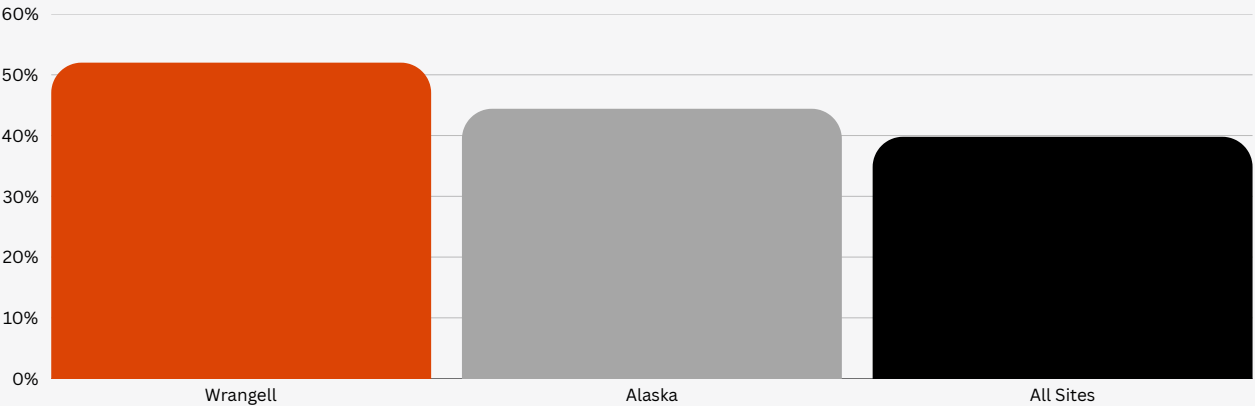
rest areas  
community gardens  
playgrounds and family amenities  
waterfront redevelopment  
maintenance of existing green spaces  
improved and expanded parks  
reallocation of industrial space  
downtown beautification and greening  
more trails



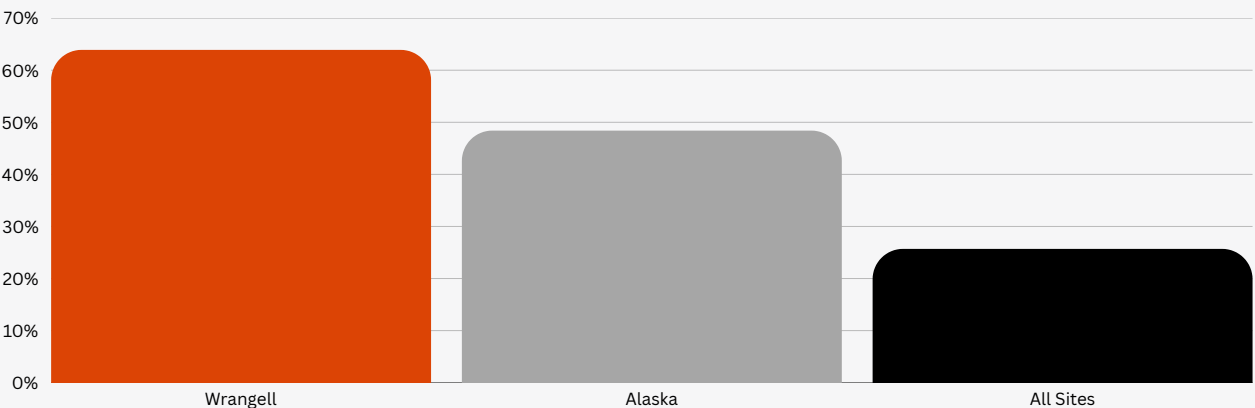
# Destination Benchmarks

# Benchmark: Impacts of Tourism

Benefits vs Costs of Tourism



Positive Impact on Quality of Life



## Tourism Impacts

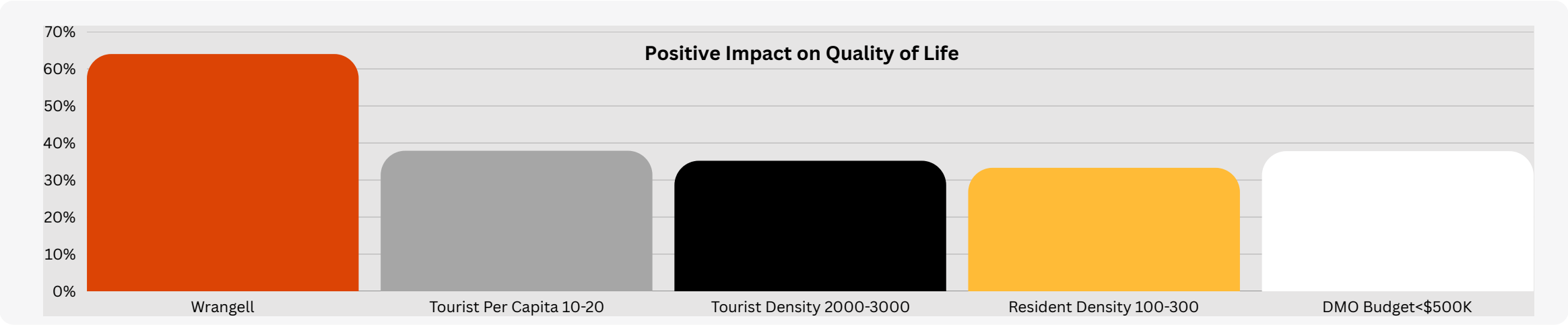
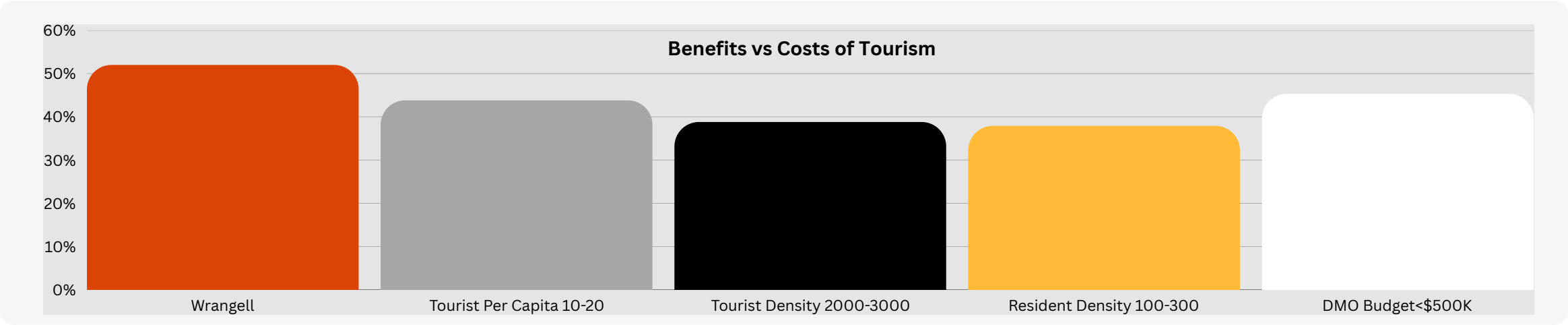
Wrangell stands out as a distinctive destination with its own mix of opportunities and challenges. Still, comparing it to other destinations—including those across Alaska—can offer valuable context and insight.

Across the 300 destinations we monitor as of 2025, including several in Alaska, residents generally report less favorable views of tourism than those in Wrangell. However, it's important to interpret these comparisons carefully. Community-level data doesn't always align neatly with regional trends—especially when some Alaskan residents live in areas with little to no tourism, which naturally shapes their perceptions.

One interesting finding was Wrangell's notably positive quality of life ratings compared to other Alaskan communities. This contrast may again reflect differences in exposure: in areas where tourism is minimal, residents may not experience either the benefits or the challenges firsthand. These differences underscore how the scale and visibility of tourism can significantly shape public sentiment—especially when residents are closely connected to its local impact.

It also points to the importance of localized planning efforts that reflect each community's unique tourism profile. For Wrangell, maintaining this positive sentiment will likely depend on balancing growth with a continued focus on resident well-being.

# Benchmark: Destination Metrics



- 1. Tourists per Capita:  $\text{Tourists per Capita} = \frac{\text{Annual Tourist Arrivals}}{\text{Resident Population}}$
- 2. Tourist Density:  $\text{Tourist Density} = \frac{\text{Annual Tourist Arrivals}}{\text{Land Area (in square miles)}}$
- 3. Resident Density:  $\text{Resident Density} = \frac{\text{Resident Population}}{\text{Land Area (in square miles)}}$
- 4. DMO Budget Total Budget: Total DMO Budget



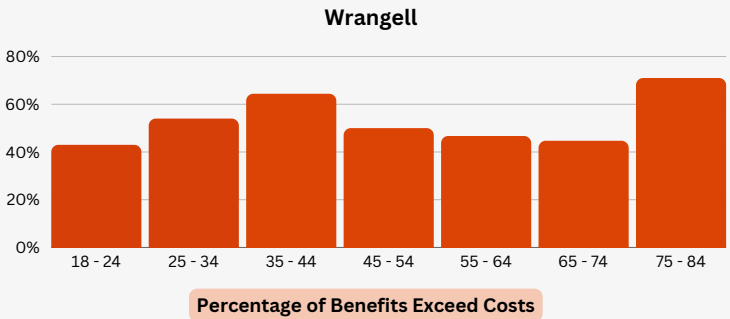
# Benchmark: Age and Residency Length

## Benefits vs Costs of Tourism

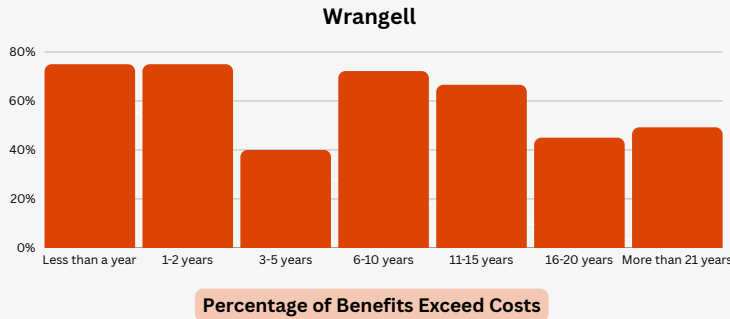
Shorter-term residents generally view tourism more favorably, likely because they benefit directly from tourism-related jobs. This trend holds true in Wrangell, where newer residents expressed more positive perceptions of tourism. Attitudes by age group were less consistent, though the 35–44 and 75+ age groups showed the highest levels of approval.

Traffic concerns are often tied to tourism, and Wrangell follows this pattern: 61% of residents attributed traffic problems to tourists. However, this figure is lower than in other Alaskan destinations, suggesting Wrangell faces a distinct set of challenges—particularly related to day-cruise visitors.

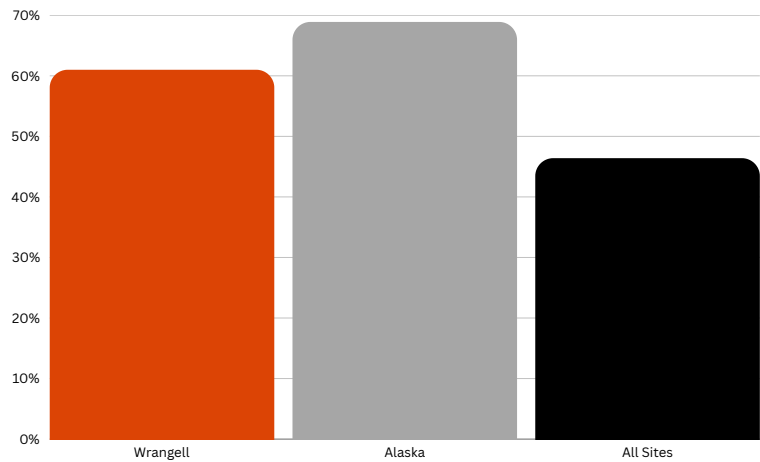
Perceptions of Tourism by Age Group



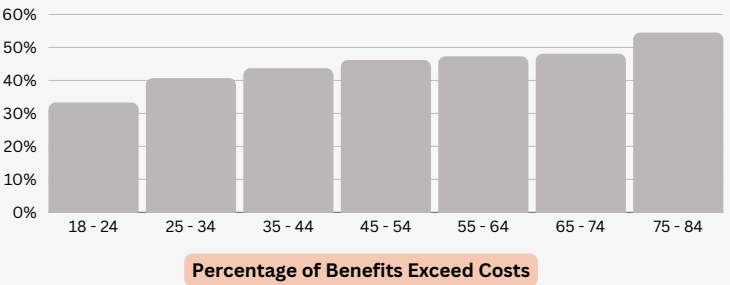
Perceptions of Tourism by Length of Residency



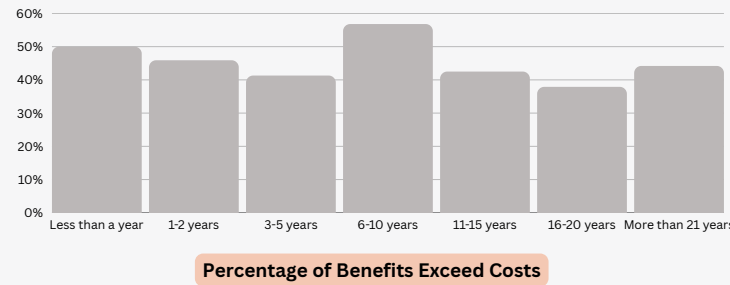
Percentage Blame Tourists for Traffic



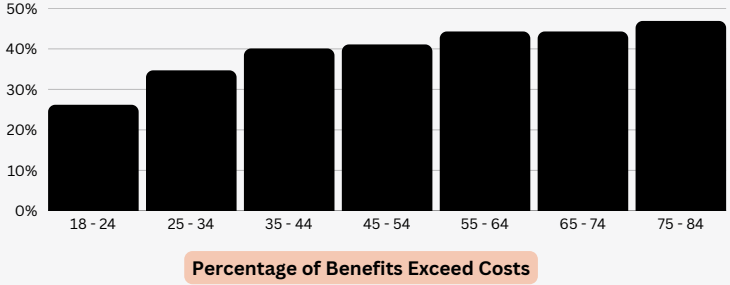
Alaska



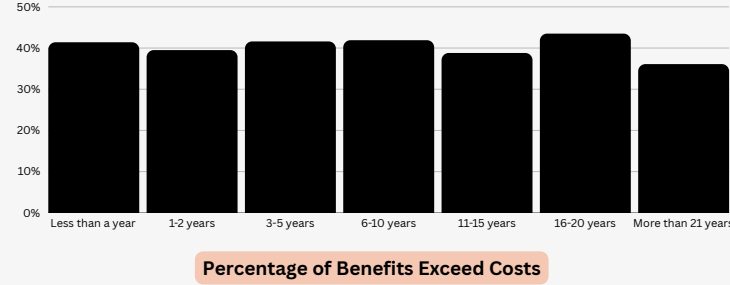
Alaska



All Destinations



All Destinations



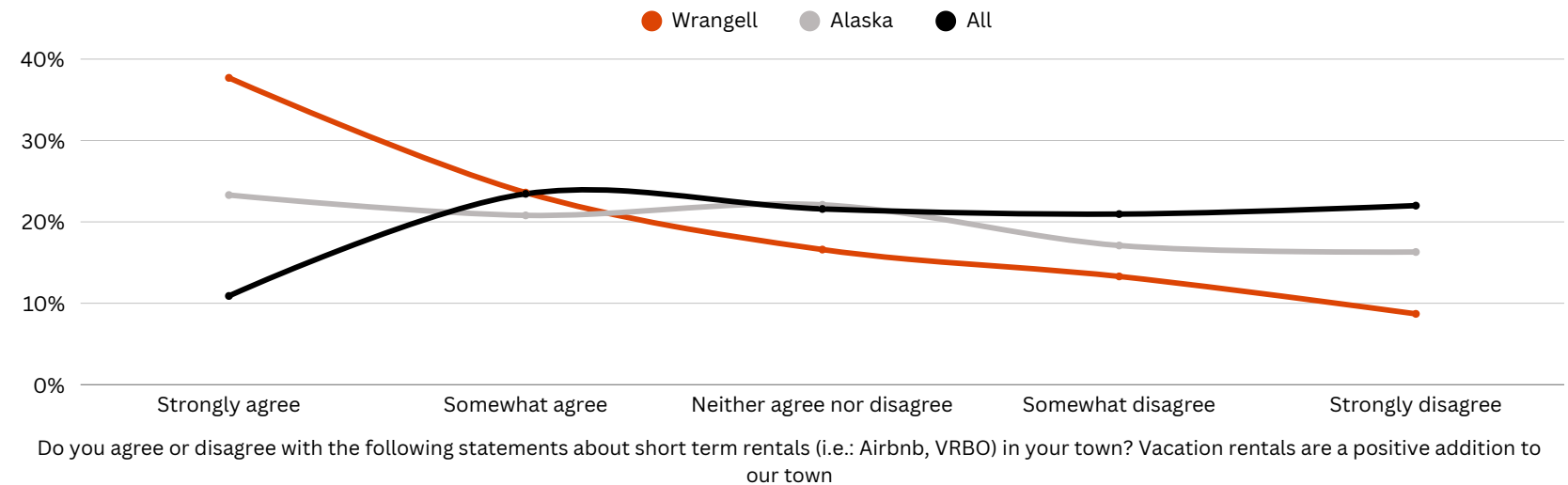
## Vacation Rentals & Environment

Vacation rentals are currently viewed more positively in Wrangell than in many other destinations. This likely reflects their relatively limited presence in the community, as Wrangell hosts a smaller volume of overnight visitors compared to more heavily trafficked areas. However, as tourism grows, resident sentiment may shift—making it important to track future changes in attitudes.

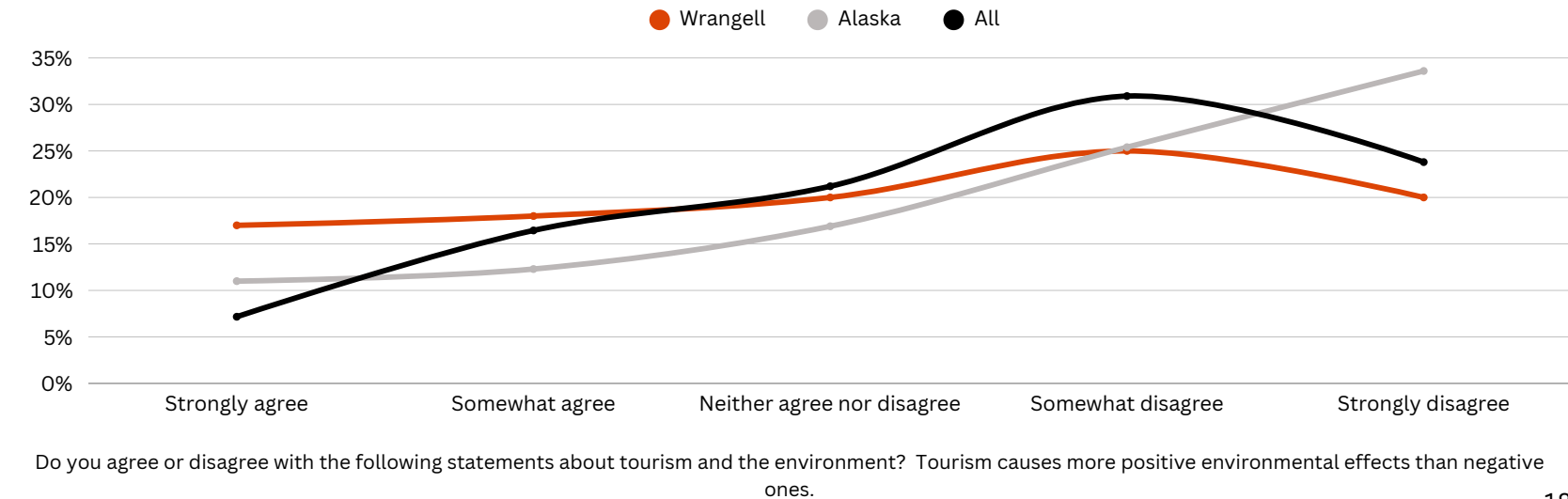
Wrangell is widely regarded as a pristine and scenic destination, and residents expressed fewer concerns about the negative impacts of tourism than respondents in Alaska and in other benchmark destinations. This is a data point to monitor, as the town’s natural beauty is a core driver of visitor demand. If residents perceive that tourism is degrading the environment, it may present a growing challenge for destination management.

Interestingly, the views on environmental impacts are in line with support levels allocating additional tax dollars to address these issues. This may also reflect uncertainty about effective solutions, hesitation to invest public funds, or a lack of consensus on who should bear the responsibility for mitigation.

Perceptions of Vacation Rentals



Perception of Tourism Impact on the Environment



## Benchmark: Most Common Benefits

### Wrangell



### Alaska



### All Destinations



In a few words, what is the biggest benefit of tourism to your town?

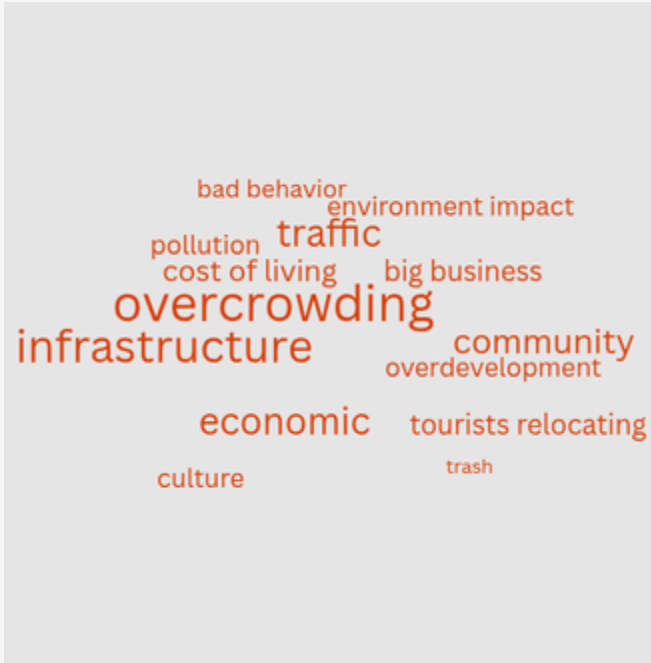
#### Benefits

As previously noted, Wrangell residents' perceptions of tourism's benefits generally align with those observed in similar destinations. Economic benefits—such as support for local businesses, job creation, and increased tax revenue—are widely recognized and appreciated. This mirrors a common pattern in tourism communities, where economic growth is viewed as one of tourism's primary advantages.

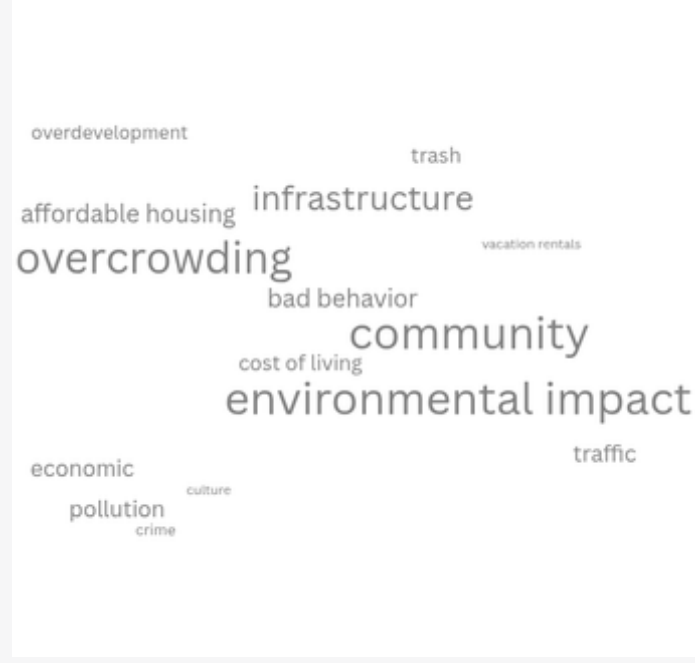
At the same time, there is a growing recognition among residents of the need for sustainable, well-managed growth. While economic gains are valued, there is likely a desire to protect the community's quality of life—a key attribute that make Wrangell appealing to both residents and visitors. This suggests a nuanced perspective: one that embraces the economic potential of tourism, but also calls for deliberate planning to ensure those benefits endure without compromising the town's character.

## Benchmark: Most Common Costs

### Wrangell



### Alaska



### All Destinations



In a few words, what is the biggest cost of tourism to your town?

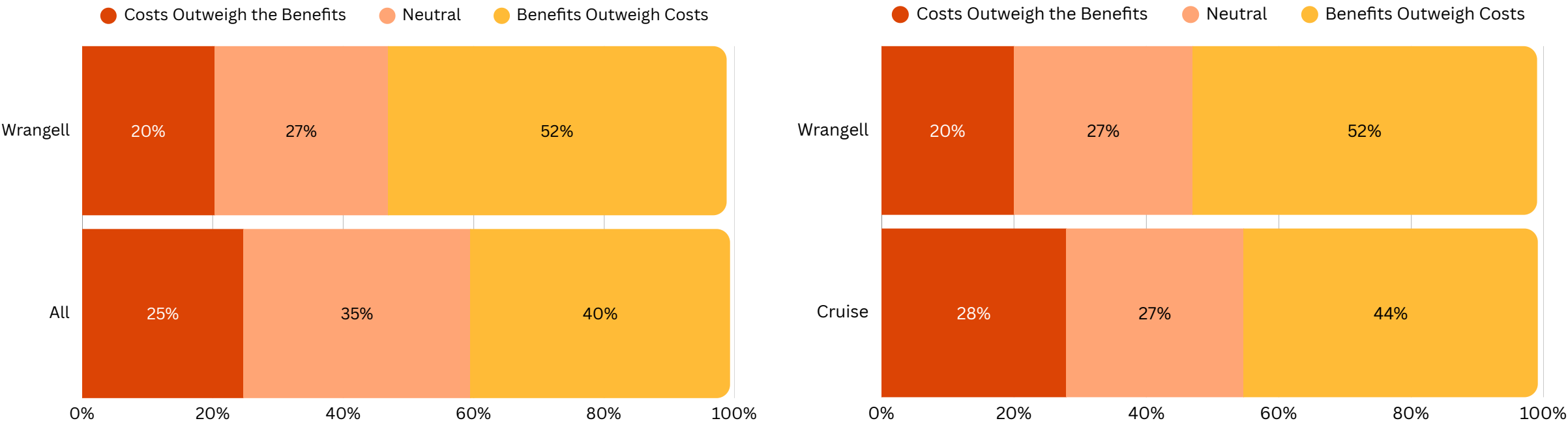
#### Costs

Overcrowding stands out as one of the most significant perceived costs of tourism in Wrangell—more prominently than in many other destinations. While this concern appears in other benchmark communities, it tends to rank lower on their list of tourism-related challenges. In Wrangell, however, residents also expressed concerns about infrastructure strain and traffic, underscoring a broader sense of pressure on local systems.

This pattern points to a unique challenge: Wrangell's smaller geographic footprint and high seasonal influx of visitors likely intensify the experience of overcrowding. As such, tourism-related impacts may feel more visible, suggesting the need for proactive planning to manage peak periods and protect residents' quality of life.



# Benchmark: Population & Cruise



### Benchmarks

To provide additional context for evaluating Wrangell’s performance, new benchmark sets were introduced—focusing on other cruise destinations and communities with similar population sizes.

Compared to its cruise destination peer group, Wrangell reports a more favorable overall perception of tourism. Specifically, residents in Wrangell perceive tourism-related costs to be approximately 8% lower than those reported in comparable cruise ports. This suggests that, despite recognizing some downsides, residents see the benefits—such as increased tax revenue and business activity—as outweighing the costs.

Similarly, Wrangell’s perceived tourism costs were also lower than in other small communities with similar populations. This trend may reflect Wrangell’s distinct tourism dynamics, where the seasonal concentration of visitors and relatively modest scale of tourism activity reduce the intensity of negative impacts—at least for now.

# Tax Revenue Allocation

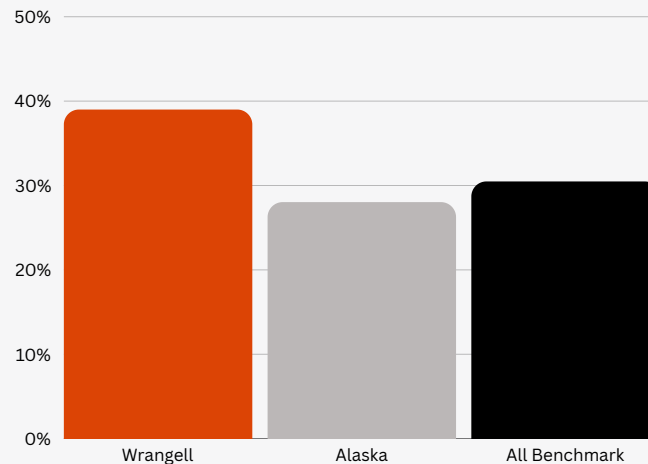
## Tax Priorities

Overall, Wrangell residents demonstrated a consistent preference for tourism tax revenue to be allocated across economic, community, and environmental priorities. Among these, community projects ranked slightly higher than economic initiatives, with environmental projects receiving the lowest prioritization.

While community investments tend to be the top priority across most Alaskan destinations, Wrangell stood out for placing greater emphasis on economic uses of tourism revenue. As noted earlier, this economic prioritization is notably higher than in both other Alaskan communities and similarly sized destinations, reflecting Wrangell's distinct perspective on the role of tourism in supporting local development.

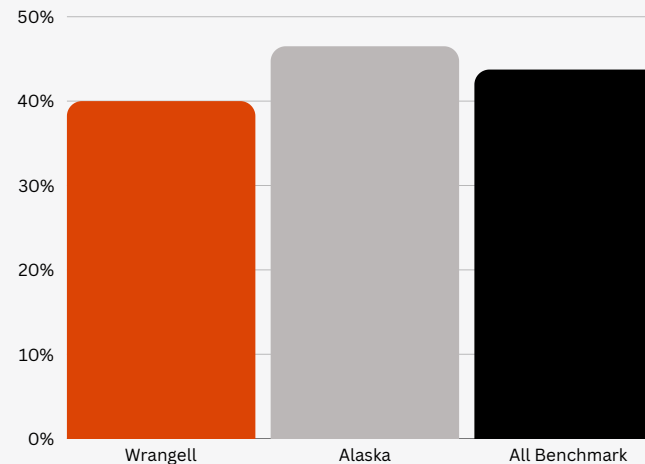
### Economic

#### Tax Priority



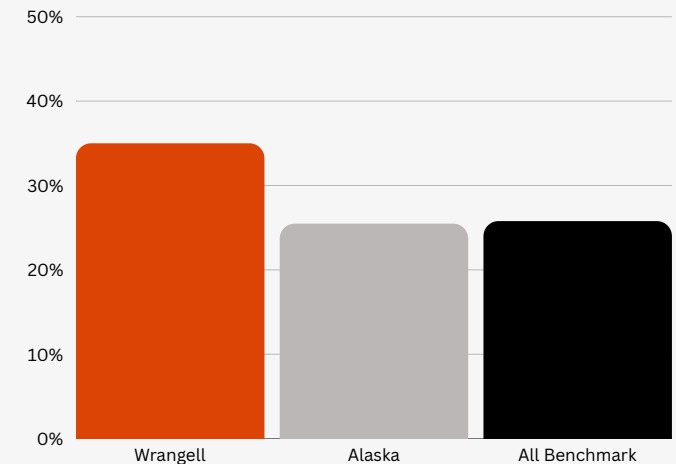
### Community

#### Tax Priority



### Environmental

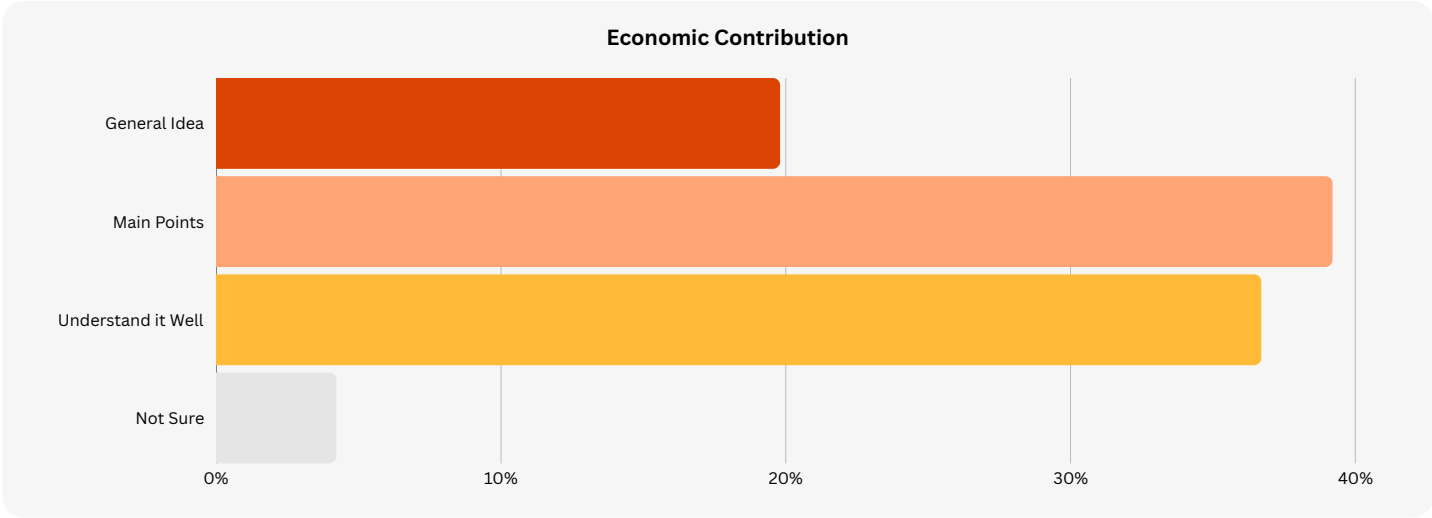
#### Tax Priority



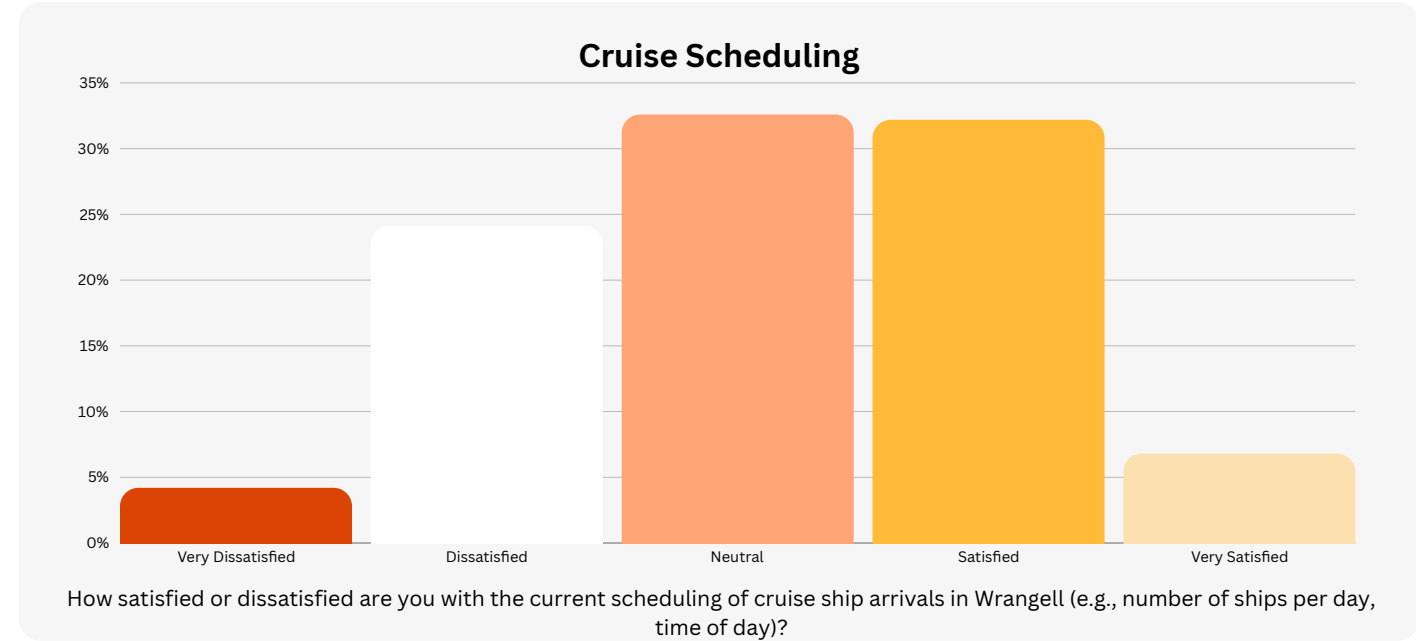
Tourist destinations often have a lodging tax (aka a tax on tourists) for anyone staying in a hotel, vacation rental, or other short-term lodging.

Please rank how you feel tax revenue should be reinvested in your town.

# Wrangell Local Questions



Which of the following best describes your understanding of the economic contribution of tourism to Wrangell (e.g. benefits of independent versus cruise ship visitors, revenue allocation, state passenger tax, port fees)?



## Local Questions

The Wrangell community believes it has a strong understanding of the economic benefits associated with tourism. Approximately 76% of respondents indicated they either understood tourism’s economic contribution well or were at least familiar with its key points. This level of awareness reinforces responses to our broader economic benefits question, which serves as a key performance indicator (KPI) across all of our destination studies. It suggests that residents are not only seeing the benefits but are also well-informed about how tourism supports local businesses, jobs, and tax revenue.

In a related question, residents also expressed support for the current cruise ship scheduling. This is particularly notable when compared to other cruise destinations, where scheduling often becomes a flashpoint for concerns around overcrowding and quality of life. Wrangell’s approval of cruise scheduling may indicate that the town has found a balance between welcoming visitors and maintaining a manageable flow of tourism activity. It may also reflect proactive planning or natural advantages—such as fewer ship arrivals—that help mitigate the more visible costs of cruise tourism. As cruise visitation patterns evolve, this will be an important area to monitor, especially given its influence on resident satisfaction in other similarly situated communities.

# Wrangell Local Questions

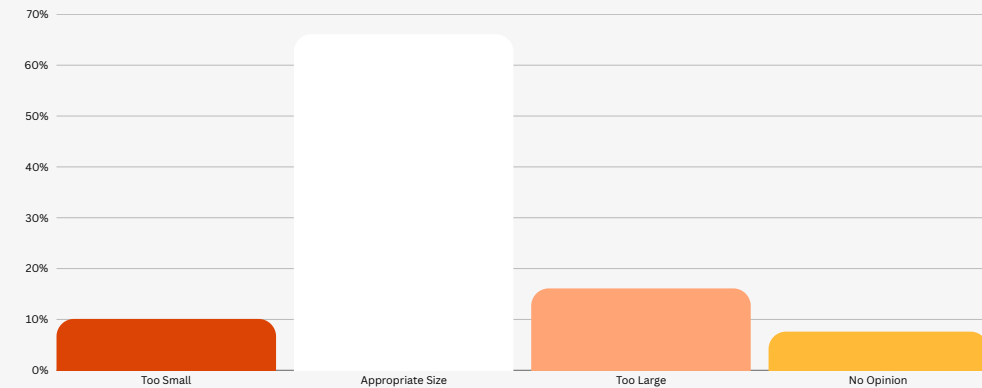
## Local Questions

The Wrangell community overwhelmingly approved of the sizes of cruise ships visiting their port. In many other destinations, ship size has emerged as a contentious issue, often linked to overcrowding, infrastructure strain, and environmental concerns. Wrangell's approval on this front reinforces earlier findings that residents are generally satisfied with the current balance and scale of tourism activity.

The final Wrangell-specific survey questions offer several layers of interpretation. On one hand, a majority of residents indicated that they do not personally benefit directly from tourism. This lends credibility to the survey sample and findings, suggesting the results are not skewed by individuals with a vested interest in the tourism industry.

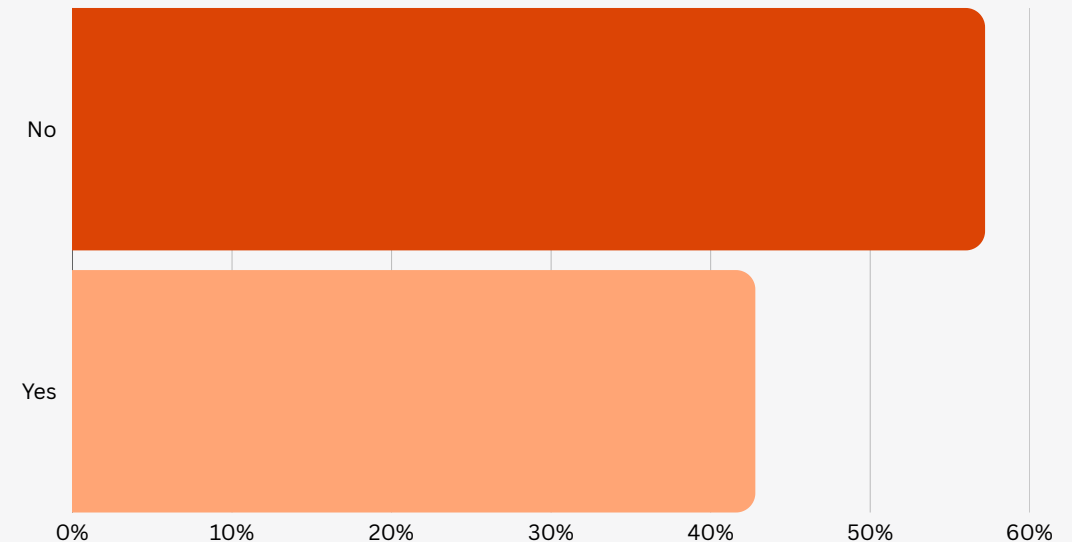
On the other hand, this response could also signal a potential gap in public understanding or recognition of tourism's broader impact. It is likely that many residents experience indirect benefits—such as improved services, enhanced community infrastructure, or greater economic vitality—without necessarily linking these to tourism. Gaining a clearer understanding of how residents perceive and differentiate between direct and indirect benefits could provide valuable insights for future engagement and communication strategies.

## Cruise Ship Size



When you think about cruise ships visiting Wrangell, which of the following best describes your perception of their size?

## Directly Benefit From Tourism



Do you or any member of your household directly benefit from the tourism industry in Wrangell (e.g., employment, business ownership, etc.)?

**THANK YOU**

OSU Sustainable Tourism Lab



