
Visitor Services Project Great Smoky Mountains National Park Report Summary

- This report describes part of the results of a visitor study at Great Smoky Mountains National Park during July 7-13, 1996. A total of 1,191 questionnaires were distributed. Visitors returned 919 questionnaires for a 77% response rate.
- This report profiles Great Smoky Mountains NP visitors. A separate appendix has visitors' comments about their visit; this report and the appendix contain a comment summary.
- Seventy-seven percent of the visitors were in family groups. Thirty-six percent of Great Smoky Mountains NP visitors were in groups of two; 35% were in groups of three or four. One percent were in guided tour groups; less than one percent were in school groups. Many visitors (39%) were aged 31-50 and 26% were aged 15 years or younger.
- Among Great Smoky Mountains NP visitors, 2% were international visitors. They were from the United Kingdom (23%), Canada (17%) and several other countries. United States visitors were from Tennessee (17%), Florida (11%), North Carolina (8%), Ohio (8%), Alabama (8%) and 31 other states, plus Washington, D.C.
- In the past year, many visitors (62%) had visited once. When asked how often they had visited during the past five years, almost two-thirds (65%) were repeat visitors. Over half of the visitors (54%) said the park was their primary destination. Seventy-seven percent of the visitors said visiting Great Smoky Mountains NP was one of the reasons they came to the area.
- Two-thirds of the visitors (66%) spent less than one day in the park. Common activities at Great Smoky Mountains NP were viewing scenery (96%), viewing wildflowers/wildlife (73%), photography (56%) and visiting historic sites (54%).
- Many visitors (71%) entered the park more than once during this trip. Fourteen percent of the visitors used more than one vehicle to travel into the park. The Gatlinburg entrance was the most used entrance and exit from the park. The Cades Cove Loop Road was the most visited place in the park (52%).
- For the use, importance and quality of services, it is important to note the number of visitor groups who responded to each question. The most used information services by 669 respondents were the park brochure/map (74%), visitor center information desk (46%), and park newspaper (38%). According to visitors, the most important services were ranger-led walks/talks (94% of 37 respondents) and self-guided trails (91% of 221 respondents). The best quality services were ranger-led walks/talks (97% of 36 respondents) and visitor center staff (92% of 191 respondents).
- The most used facilities or services by 778 respondents were the restrooms (83%), highway directional signs (61%), and trails (51%). According to visitors, the most important facilities were campgrounds (98% of 95 respondents) and restrooms (96% of 618 respondents). The best quality facilities were the telephones (86% of 58 respondents), highway directional signs (86% of 447 respondents) and picnic areas (86% of 273 respondents).
- For total expenditures, the average summer visitor group spent \$564. The average per capita expenditure was \$168. The median visitor group expenditure (50% of groups spent more; 50% spent less) was \$440.
- Most visitors (90%) rated the overall quality of services in the park as "good" or "very good." Visitors made many additional comments.

For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact the University of Idaho Cooperative Park Studies Unit; phone (208) 885-7129 or 885-7863.
