

VISITORS COUNT!

**CHARACTERISTICS OF VISITORS AT THE
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY
KENNETH E. BEHRING CENTER
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION**

April 2007

**OFFICE OF POLICY AND ANALYSIS
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *2006 Visitors Count!* was undertaken to determine how visitation at the National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center (NMAH) has changed since the last major demographic study conducted there in 1994-1995. This report summarizes the results. Its purpose is to share with NMAH and the museum community what we learned about the characteristics of visitors over a seven-month period. NMAH will use the data and observations as they plan to reopen the museum in about two years with new public spaces, exhibitions, and programs.

The report reflects the cooperation and support of numerous people in the planning, execution, data collection and analysis phases. In the Office of Policy and Analysis, Zahava D. Doering, Senior Social Scientist, had overall responsibility for all phases of the study. David Karns, Senior Behavioral Scientist, ably assisted her, especially in the analysis. Andrew Pekarik joined in the analysis and co-authored the report. At NMAH, Brent D. Glass, Director, and Judy Gradwohl, Associate Director for Public Programs, supported the study and encouraged staff participation. Gretchen Jennings, Director of Education for Interpretation and Visitor Experience, initiated and guided the study. Howard Morrison, Interpretive Specialist, skillfully managed the interviewing schedules and monitored the data collection. NMAH staff, docent and intern participation as interviewers was critical to the study's success. The following took time from their hectic schedules to help:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study collected demographic information on NMAH visitors in winter (February), spring (March and April), and summer (June and July) of 2006. In comparing that data with what was collected in the year-long 1994-95 study in winter (December, January and February), spring (March, April and May), and summer (June, July and August), we can find three major differences:

- In 1994-95 there were more male visitors (55% winter, 52% spring, 50% summer), but in all three seasons of 2006 there were more female visitors (54% winter, 54% spring, 56% summer).
- Compared to spring visitors in 1994-95, spring visitors in 2006 included a higher percentage of visit groups from outside the Washington Metropolitan Area (82% in '94-95; 92% in '06).
- Compared to winter visitors in 1994-95, winter visitors in 2006 included
 - a higher percentage of first-time visitors (37% in '94-95; 48% in '06),
 - a higher percentage of visit groups with children (18% in '94-95; 31% in '06),
 - a higher percentage of visit groups from outside the Washington Metropolitan Area (73% in '94-95; 86% in '06).

The 2006 study also collected new, more detailed information about the composition of visitor groups and the ages of children.

Key findings about visitor groups include:

- Depending on season, a substantial percentage of visit groups include at least one child under 18 (31% winter, 34% spring, 43% summer).
- About one-quarter or more of these groups with children include at least one child under the age of 6 (28% in winter, 23% in spring, 28% in summer).
- Among all visit groups in the museum (including those visiting alone) between 6% and 10% of them include at least one child under the age of 6 (6% in winter, 8% in spring, and 10% in summer).

Key findings about the ages of visitors include:

- One-third of all voluntary visitors (i.e., all visitors except those in school groups or organized groups) are under 18 (32% winter, 34% spring, 34% summer).
- Children under age 5 comprise 5% of all voluntary visitors in the three seasons (5% winter, 5% spring, 6% summer).
- Children ages 6-8 comprise another 5% of all voluntary visitors (5% winter, 6% spring, 6% summer).
- Children ages 10-12 comprise 10% of all voluntary visitors (10% winter, 11% spring, 10% summer).

- Children ages 13-17 comprise 11-13% of all voluntary visitors (13% winter, 12% spring, 11% summer).

After adjusting for special events, it is possible to estimate the number of voluntary visitors below the age of 18.

- Of the three seasons, winter is slowest. During winter there are estimated to be anywhere from 8,000 to 19,000 children between the ages of 1 and 5. There are about twice as many in spring as in winter, and about three times as many in summer as in winter.
- The number of children ages 6 to 8 is about the same as those ages 1 to 5.
- The number of children ages 9 to 12 varies from a low of 19,000 to 34,000 in winter, to more than twice as many in spring (51,000 to 81,000), and even more in summer (70,000 to 98,000).
- The number of teens varies from a low of 27,000 to 45,000 in winter, to twice as many in spring (54,000 to 89,000), to even more in summer (73,000 to 105,000).

Of course, there are many more children in the museum each year than these numbers indicate, since the number of children in the museum with school groups cannot be estimated from this data, and since the fall season was not part of the study.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In winter of 2006, Gretchen Jennings, Director of Education for Interpretation and Visitor Experience, the National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center (NMAH), Smithsonian Institution, invited staff from the Smithsonian's Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to undertake updating the demographic information about the museum's visitorship collected in 1994-95.¹ Such a study was especially urgent in view of the pending (September) closure of NMAH for renovation with new public spaces, exhibitions, and programs. This report presents the results of the *2006 Visitors Count! Study*.

Several considerations determined the design of the present study. Both NMAH & OP&A were committed to replicating the 1994-95 study to the extent possible. However, resource and schedule constraints led to differences between the two undertakings. The first major difference is that interviewers administered the 1994-95 study, while the present study used self-administered questionnaires. In turn, this led to a much shorter questionnaire in 2006. The closing of the museum in September meant that a full year of data collection was not possible. Thus, the present study collected data in the following five months: February (winter), March and April (spring) and July and August (summer).²

During each survey session, trained NMAH staff, volunteers and interns, working in teams, intercepted exiting visitors at either the Mall or Madison Drive (south) and Constitution Avenue (north) doors and distributed a short questionnaire. When visitors declined to participate, the team member who had approached the visitor recorded a few basic facts from observation. (The questionnaire, with questions to be completed by interviewers in the case of refusals, is in Appendix A, together with the data collection schedule.)

The self-administered questionnaires were distributed to one member of each group of visitors exiting the museum over a period of two weeks during the survey months (February, March, April, July and August). Only visitors age 12 or older were interviewed. The study excluded Smithsonian staff and contractors, and people ineligible for the study because they were not making a museum visit (e.g., in the building to ask directions or to use the telephone). Members of formal tour and school groups were intercepted only if they were exiting the museum independently of their group. During the interviewing sessions, 3,933 visit groups were intercepted as they exited the museum. From these, 3,893 were eligible for

¹ See Kindlon, A. E., Pekarik, A. J., & Doering, Z. D. (1996). *Visitors to History: A Report Based on the 1994-95 National Museum of American History Visitor Study* (Report 96-3B). Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.

² During those months, the data collection took place at the same time (time of the month and time in the day) as it did in 1994-95. Coincidentally, the calendar dates matched as well.

the study and 2,888 completed the questionnaire, an overall cooperation rate of 74 percent.

A Caution About Comparisons

Although results of the 2006 study and the 1994-95 study can be compared to show general trends, these two studies are not strictly comparable, because

- some questions were asked differently (e.g., ethnicity),
- season samples were not equivalent (e.g., the winter season included only February in the 2006 study, but included December, January, and February in the 1994-95 study), and
- the surveys were administered differently (the 2006 study used a self-administered questionnaire, while the 1994-95 study used interviewers).

Some Definitions

- *Voluntary visitor* refers to a visitor who did not come to the museum as part of a school group or other organized group
- *Visit group* refers to the social unit of the visitor within the museum. A visit group of one person is a visitor who came to the museum alone. In the 2006 study, as in the 1994-95 study, only one person in a visit group was surveyed.
- *Visit group respondent* refers to the person in the visit group who completed the survey.

A Word About Percentages

In the discussion, comparisons are made across seasons. These can give misleading impressions about the size of the audiences involved. For example, while about one-fourth of visit groups in each season are visiting the Smithsonian and NMAH for the first time, the number of visit groups varies considerably across seasons. Although the percentage of first-time visit groups is higher in the winter compared to summer, the actual number is larger in the summer because there are so many more visit groups in the museum overall.

Report Contents

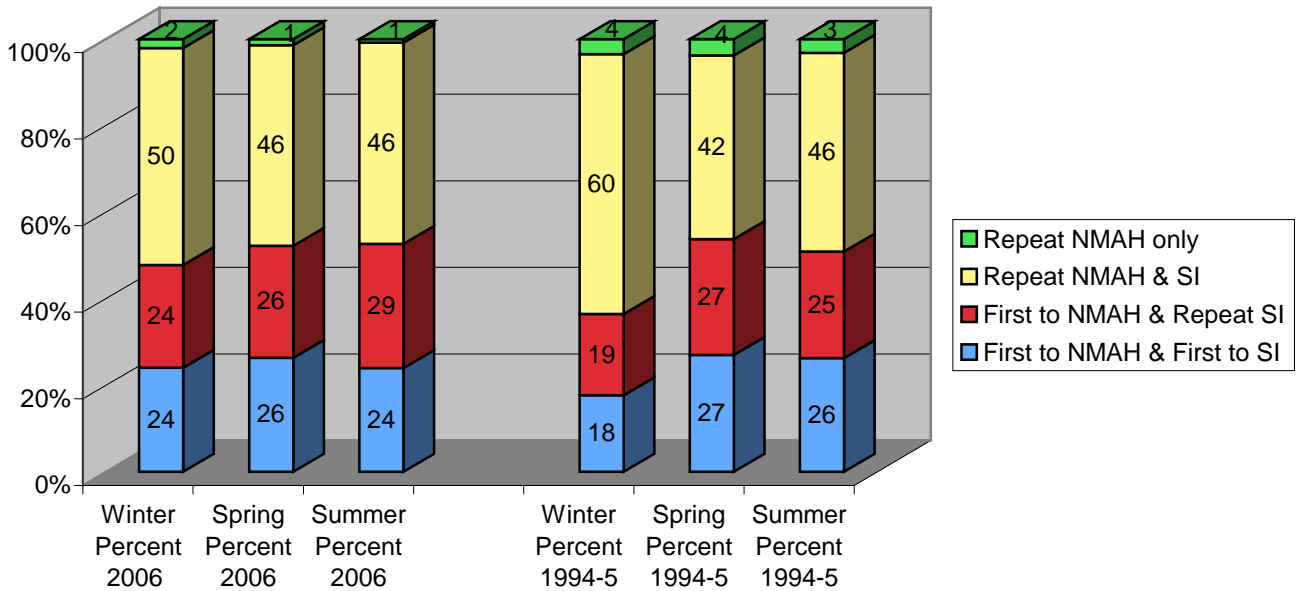
The next section profiles the demographic characteristics of visit groups and visitors, noting the few significant season differences. The appendices contain supporting materials such as questionnaires and frequencies from both the 2006 and 1994-95 study.

VISIT AND VISITOR CHARACTERISTICS

Familiarity with NMAH

For about one-fourth of the visitors, the day of the interview was their first visit to both NMAH and the Smithsonian. Another fourth had been to the Smithsonian previously, but were new to NMAH. The rest were repeat visitors to both NMAH and the Smithsonian. Consistently, about one percent is dedicated to NMAH: they are repeat visitors to the museum but do not report visiting other Smithsonian museums. In 2006 winter was more like the other seasons than in 1994-95 (see Figure 1). Winter 1994-95 included fewer first time visitors (both to NMAH and the Smithsonian) compared to 2006 (37% vs. 48%).

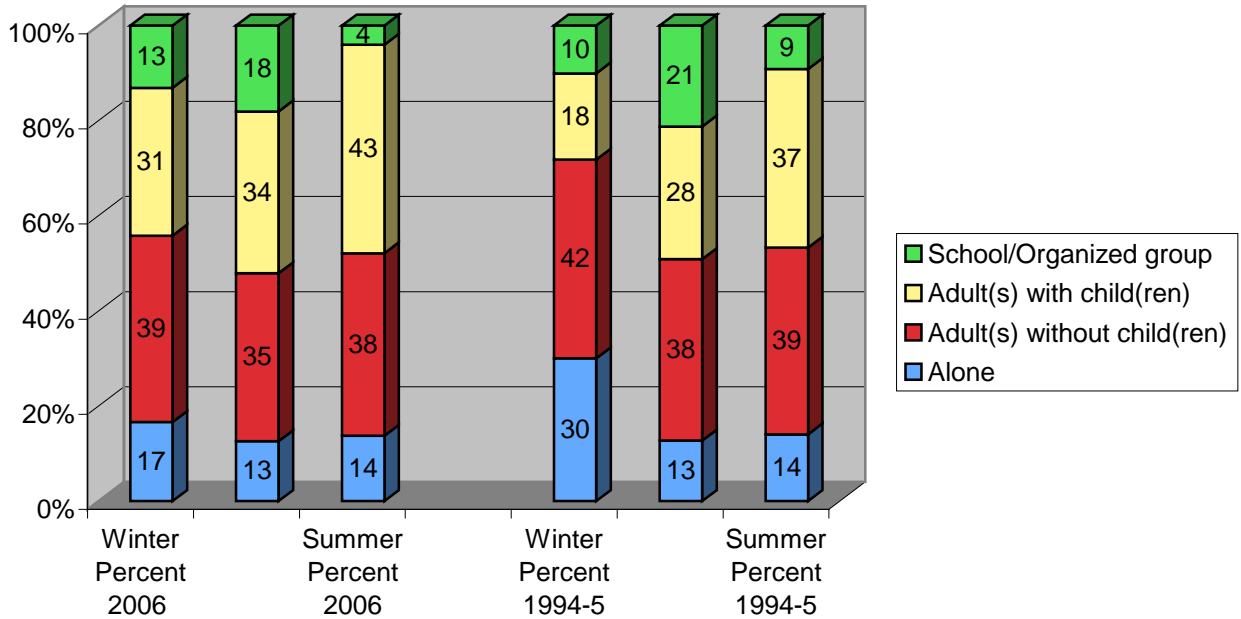
Figure 1
Familiarity with NMAH, 2006
[In Percent]



Social Composition of Visit Groups

In all three seasons of 2006, slightly over one-third of visit groups included two or more adults without children. A similar percentage of visitor groups included at least one child under 18 depending on the season (31% winter, 34% spring, 43% summer). About one-quarter or more of these groups with children include at least one child under the age of 6 (28% in winter, 23% in spring, 28% in summer). In winter of 2006 visitor groups were more similar to the other two seasons than winter visit groups in 1994-95. In 2006, although 13% to 17% of the visit groups were solitary visitors (17% winter, 13% spring, 14% summer), these lone visitors represented less than 10% of the overall audience (9% winter, 6% spring, 5% summer).

Figure 2
Social Composition of Visit Groups, 2006
 [In Percent]



Sex and Age

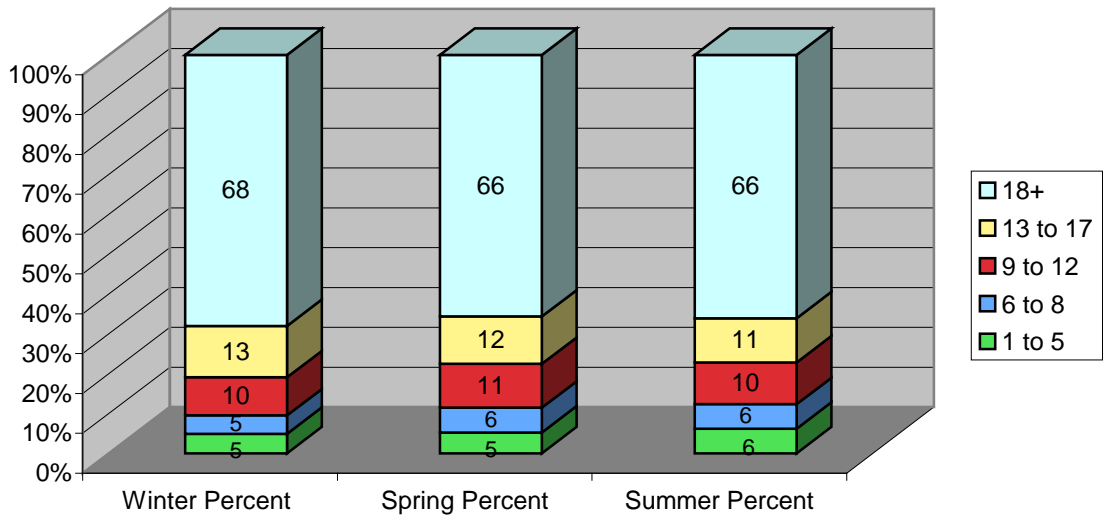
Over the course of the 2006 study, more women visited the museum (54% winter and spring, 56% summer). This is different from 1994-95, when more men visited (55% winter, 52% spring, 50% summer).

In the *2006 Visitors Count!* study, special attention was paid to the ages of children (under 18). Respondents were asked to list the number of adults and the ages of all children in their groups. For visitors 18 and older, only the respondent’s age was collected.

Looking at the entire population of voluntary visitors in the museum, children comprise 32% of all voluntary visitors in winter, and 34% in spring and summer.

- Children under age 5 comprise 5% of all voluntary visitors in the three seasons (5% winter, 5% spring, 6% summer).
- Children ages 6-8 comprise another 5% of all voluntary visitors (5% winter, 6% spring, 6% summer).
- Children ages 10-12 comprise 10% of all voluntary visitors (10% winter, 11% spring, 10% summer).
- Children ages 13-17 comprise 11-13% of all voluntary visitors (13% winter, 12% spring, 11% summer).

Figure 3
Ages of All Visitors, 2006
 [In Percent]



After adjusting for special events, it is possible to estimate the number of voluntary visitors below the age of 18.

- Of the three seasons, winter is slowest. During winter there are estimated to be anywhere from 8,000 to 19,000 children between the ages of 1 and 5. There are about twice as many in spring as in winter, and about three times as many in summer as in winter.
- The number of children ages 6 to 8 is about the same as those ages 1 to 5.
- The number of children ages 9 to 12 varies from a low of 19,000 to 34,000 in winter, to more than twice as many in spring (51,000 to 81,000), and even more in summer (70,000 to 98,000).
- The number of teens varies from a low of 27,000 to 45,000 in winter, to twice as many in spring (54,000 to 89,000), to even more in summer (73,000 to 105,000).

Of course, there are many more children in the museum each year than these numbers indicate, since the number of children in the museum with school groups cannot be estimated from this data, and since the fall season was not part of the study.

Ethnic/Racial Identification (US residents only)

There are some changes in the racial/ethnic composition of visitors from 1994-95, with increases in all non-white categories. However, caution is called for because the classifications are not completely comparable. In 2006, one question asked if the person was of Latino/Hispanic origin. The next question asked respondents to mark one or more racial descriptions following Office of Management and Budget requirements. Thus, for example, we find Latinos who mark African-American and Latinos who mark White. It is possible for a visitor from a multi-

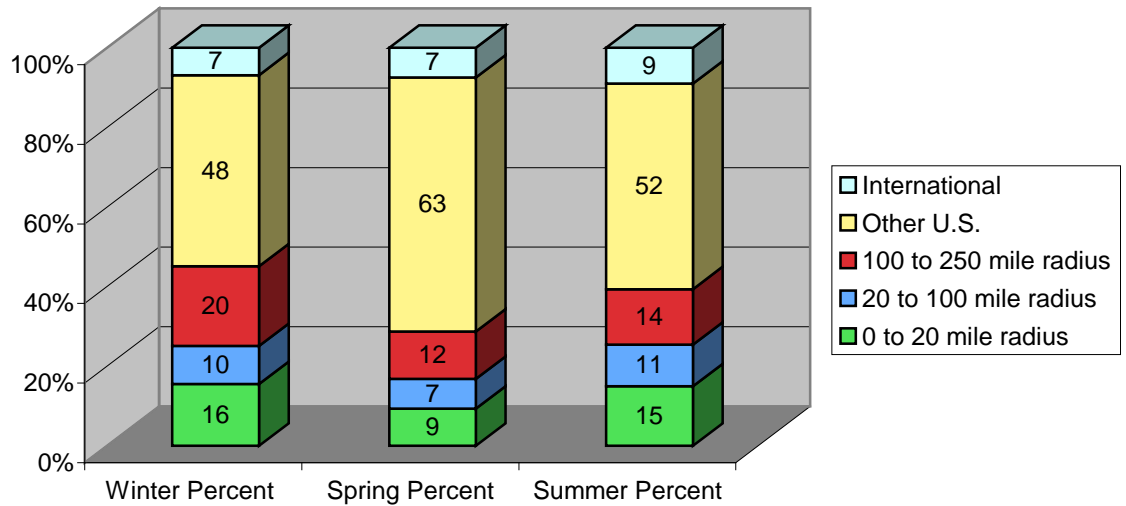
racial background to check Latino/Hispanic, Black, and White. In 1994-95, Hispanic-Latino was included as a choice in the list of racial/ethnic backgrounds, so individuals had to select either Latino/Hispanic or a racial classification.

Residence

In the course of the 2006 survey, visitors from nearly every state and over 57 countries were interviewed.

In both winter and summer 2006, about half of the visit groups come from more than 250 miles away (48% in winter, 52% in spring). In summer that percentage rises to nearly two-thirds (63%). In addition, visit groups from between 100 and 250 miles away comprise a higher percentage in winter than in spring or summer (20% winter, 12% spring, 14% summer). The percentage of international visit groups is about the same throughout the seasons (7% winter and spring, 9% summer).

Figure 4
Residence from the Mall, in Distance, 2006
 [In Percent]



DISCUSSION


The results of the 2006 Visitors Count! survey, in general, confirm the results from the 1994-95 survey. Data from both of these surveys, combined with qualitative and quantitative studies of specific exhibitions can help inform planning for the forthcoming NMAH building renovation.

The museum needs to consider a balance of services and programmatic offerings that will appeal to the expectations and interests of its varied audiences. For example, there is a need to balance the needs of the physically limited older population with the kinetic enthusiasm of the toddler set and teen-agers. There is a need to recognize that since museum-going is a social activity for most visitors and spaces which facilitate social interaction will be desirable. Visitors come to NMAH from across the United States and include many international visitors. In addition to differences that arise from living in different places, there are differences in the experiences and perspectives of different ethnic and racial groups.

APPENDIX A
2006 Visitors Count! Questionnaire

2006 VISITORS COUNT!

National Museum of American History

1. Is today your first visit to this American History museum?
 Yes No
2. Before today, have you visited any other Smithsonian museums?
 Yes No
- *3. Who are you here with today? (Mark one or more)
 School group
 Organized/tour group
 I am alone
 One other adult (over 18)
 Several other adults  **HOW MANY?** _____
 Youth/Child[ren] under 18
PLEASE RECORD AGES

- *4. Where do you live?
 US: Zip Code **PLEASE SPECIFY** _____
 Other country **PLEASE SPECIFY** _____
5. Are you of Latino or Hispanic origin?
 Yes No
6. What race do you consider yourself to be? (Mark one or more)
 African American or Black
 American Indian or Alaskan Native
 Asian American
 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 White
- *7. What is your gender?
 Female Male
- *8. What is your age? _____

THANK YOU!

COUNT _____ STATUS _____ INT _____ SESSION _____

APPENDIX B

2006 and 1994-95 Frequencies

This Appendix presents the frequencies for all of the questions in the 2006 survey, (indicated by question number (#)), as well as some tables based on that data.

The frequencies are based on the percentages of visitors responding to a particular question. The number of visitors who responded to each question varies, as not all visitors answered each question. Frequencies from the 1994-95 survey are from the published report cited in the preceding text.

Table 1. Cooperation Rate			
	2006 Study		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Complete	77	72	73
Refusal	23	28	27
Total	100	100	100
	Number	Number	Number
Complete	724	811	1206
Refusal	213	312	439
Total	937	1123	1645

Table 2. Smithsonian History for Visit Group Respondents

	2006 Study			1994-95 Study (Table 20a)		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
First to NMAH/First to SI	24	26	24	18	27	26
First to NMAH/Repeat to SI	24	26	29	19	27	25
Repeat to NMAH only	2	1	1	4	4	3
Repeat to NMAH & SI	50	46	46	60	42	46
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

#1. Is today your first visit to this American History museum?

	2006 Study			1994-95 Study (Table 20a)		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Yes	48	52	53	37	54	51
No	52	48	47	64	46	49
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

#2. Before today, have you visited any other Smithsonian museums?

	2006 Study			1994-95 Study (Table 20a)		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Yes	74	72	75	79	69	71
No	26	28	25	21	31	30
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 3. Visit Group Composition

#3. Who are you here with today? (Mark one of more)	2006 Study			1994-95 Study (Table 11)		
	Winter	Spring	Summer	Winter	Spring	Summer
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Alone	17	13	14	30	13	14
Adult(s) without child(ren)	39	35	38	42	38	39
Adult(s) with child(ren)	31	34	43	18	28	37
Unaccompanied youth	1	1	1	1	1	2
School group/Other group	13	18	4	11	22	11
Total	100	99	100	101	101	102

Table 4. Visit Group Size

Total Number in Group	2006 Study			1994-95 Study (Table 11)		
	Winter	Spring	Summer	Winter	Spring	Summer
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
1	23	18	17	30	13	14
2	40	34	31	32	30	31
3	14	15	14	12	14	15
4	11	17	16	10	11	15
5	6	9	10	5	6	8
6-9	5	7	10	5	7	9
10+	0	1	2	7	19	8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 5. Residence of Visit Group Respondent

#4. Where do you live?	2006 Study			1994-95 Study (Table 7)		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
US	93	93	91	91	94	91
Other country	7	7	9	9	6	9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 6. US Regions of Residence of Visit Group Respondent

	2006 Study			1994-95 Study (Table 7)		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
New England	9	9	6	5	8	6
Mid Atlantic	23	11	12	14	20	13
Metro Washington	14	8	13	27	18	15
South Atlantic*	18	21	23	18	13	15
East South Central	3	5	3	2	4	4
West South Central	4	6	5	3	5	6
East North Central	9	9	11	9	8	11
West North Central	3	7	4	3	5	6
Mountain	2	5	4	3	5	4
Pacific	9	8	8	7	7	11
US [Unspecified]	1	2	2	0	1	0
International	7	7	9	9	6	9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Excluding Metro Washington

Table 7. Residence Radius [from Mall] of Visit Group Respondent

	2006 Study		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
5 mile radius	5	2	5
10 mile radius	5	3	5
20 mile radius	5	3	6
40 mile radius	4	4	5
100 mile radius	5	4	4
250 mile radius	20	12	14
Other U.S.	48	63	52
International	7	7	9
Total	100	100	100

Table 8. Ethnicity of Visit Group Respondent

What is your cultural/racial/ethnic identity?*	1994-95 Study (Table 5)		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Latino/Native American/Alaska Native	4	4	5
African American/Black	5	4	5
Asian/Pacific Islander	4	3	4
White	87	89	86
Total	100	100	100
**US residents only.			
#5. Are you of Latino or Hispanic origin?*	2006 Study		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Yes	9	5	7
No	91	95	93
Total	100	100	100
**US residents only.			
#6. What race do you consider yourself to be? (Mark one or more)			
African American or Black**	2006 Study		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Not marked	94	93	90
Marked	6	7	10
Total	100	100	100
**US residents only.			
American Indian or Alaskan Native**	2006 Study		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Not marked	99	99	99
Marked	1	1	1
Total	100	100	100
**US residents only.			

Table 8. Ethnicity of Visit Group Respondent (continued)

Asian American**			
	2006 Study		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Not marked	94	95	94
Marked	6	5	6
Total	100	100	100
**US residents only.			
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander**			
	2006 Study		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Not marked	99	99	99
Marked	1	1	1
Total	100	100	100
**US residents only.			
White**			
	2006 Study		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Not marked	12	13	16
Marked	88	87	84
Total	100	100	100
**US residents only.			

Table 9. Cultural/Racial/Ethnic Identification of Visit Group Respondent**

	2006 Study			1994-95 Study (Table 5)		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Latino, Other single races (not Latino), and Multiple races (not Latino)	22	20	24	10		
White, not Latino	78	80	76	90		
Total	100	100	100	100		
**US residents only.						

Table 10. Gender of Visit Group Respondent

#7. What is your gender?	2006 Study			1994-95 Study (Table 5)		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Female	54	54	56	45	48	50
Male	46	46	44	55	52	50
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 11. Age of Visit Group Respondent: Intervals

#8. What is your age?	2006 Study			1994-95 Study (Table 5)		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Age Group						
12-14	5	3	1	6	8	6
15-17	5	5	3	4	6	8
18-19	3	3	3	4	3	3
20-24	9	6	9	8	6	8
25-34	18	14	18	24	15	17
35-44	22	29	26	20	26	24
45-54	25	25	25	20	20	21
55-64	10	10	12	9	8	7
65+	4	6	3	6	8	7
Total	100	100	100	101	100	101

Table 12. Generations of Visit Group Respondent

Generation	2006 Study		
	Winter Percent	Spring Percent	Summer Percent
Gen Y	32	22	25
Gen X	20	23	23
Trailing Edge Boomers	27	33	30
Leading Edge Boomers	15	15	15
Postwar	5	8	6
World War II	1	0	1
Depression	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100