

Executive Summary

This visitor study report profiles a systematic random sample of Mount Rainier National Park (NP) visitors during August 4–10, 2012. A total of 1,113 questionnaires were distributed to visitor groups. Of those, 702 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 63.1% response rate.

Group size and type	Forty-two percent of visitor groups consisted of two people and 32% were in groups of three or four. Sixty-seven percent of visitor groups consisted of family groups; 14% were with friends.
State or country of residence	United States visitors were from 45 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico, and comprised 95% of total visitation during the survey period, with 61% of visitors from Washington. Eleven percent of visitor groups were residents of the area (within 30 miles of the park). International visitors were from 17 countries and comprised 5% of total visitation during the survey period, with 36% from Canada.
Frequency of visits	Many visitors (70%) visited the park once in the past 12 months and 17% visited two or three times. Fifty-five percent of visitors visited the park once in the past two to five years and 20% visited two or three times.
Age, gender, and educational level	Forty-five percent of visitors were ages 41-65 years, 19% were 26-40 years old, 15% were ages 15 years or younger, and 11% were 66 years or older. Fifty-one percent of respondents were female. Forty percent of respondents had completed a graduate degree and 34% had a bachelor's degree.
Household income	Nineteen percent of respondents reported a household income of \$100,000-\$149,999 and 19% had an income of \$50,000-\$74,999. Forty-five percent of respondents had two people in their household and 32% had three or four people.
Information sources	Most visitor groups (85%) obtained information about the park prior to their visit through the park website (58%), previous visits (52%), and friends/relatives/word of mouth (38%). The information source receiving the highest combined proportions of “extremely important” and “very important” ratings were inquiry to park via phone, mail, or email (81%), previous visits (72%), and the park website (72%).
Park as destination	During the on-site interview, 82% of visitor groups said the park was their primary destination and for 13% the park was one of several destinations.

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Primary reason for visiting the area	The most common primary reasons for visiting the park area (within 30 miles) among non-resident visitor groups were to visit the park (81%) and visit friends/relatives in the area (6%).
Alternative plans to visiting the park	Fifty percent of respondents would have visited another recreation site had they not visited the park on this visit. Thirty percent of respondents would have driven 201 or more miles to an alternate recreation site.
Number of park entries and number of vehicles	Seventy-three percent of visitor groups entered the park once, while 23% entered two or three times. Eighty-six percent of visitor groups used one vehicle to arrive at the park, while 9% used two vehicles.
Overnight stays and lodging used	Forty-two percent of visitor groups stayed overnight in the park or in the area within 30 miles of the park.
Overnight stays – number of nights	Of those visitor groups that stayed in the park, 64% stayed one or two nights, while 36% stayed three or more nights. Of those visitor groups that stayed in the area outside the park, 58% stayed one or two nights, while 42% of visitor groups stayed three or more nights.
Type of lodging used	Among those visitor groups that stayed overnight inside the park, 57% camped in a developed campground (either tent or RV campsite - three groups used both tent and RV campsites) and 29% stayed in an inn. Among those visitor groups that stayed overnight in the area outside of the park, 55% stayed in a lodge, hotel, motel, vacation rental, B&B, etc., 20% tent camped in a developed campground, and 14% camped in their RV.
Length of visit	Of the visitor groups that spent less than 24 hours in the park, the average length of stay was 5.4 hours. Of the visitor groups that spent 24 hours or more, the average length of stay was 2.8 days. The average length of stay for all visitor groups was 26.5 hours, or 1.1 days.
Sites visited	The most common places visited in the park were Paradise (70%), Longmire (40%), and Sunrise (30%).
Activities on this visit	The most common activities were viewing wildflowers (79%), day hiking (75%), and driving to view scenery (73%). The two most important activities were day hiking (49%) and driving to view scenery (21%). Many visitor groups (78%) hiked on this visit. Of those, 50% hiked in or near developed areas: Paradise (65%) and Sunrise (32%). Among hikers on this visit, 46% hiked more than four hours (combined), while 34% hiked between two and four hours.

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Shuttle bus service	Twenty-eight percent of visitor groups were aware of the shuttle bus service prior to their visit. Four percent of visitor groups had used the shuttle bus service on a previous visit. Thirteen percent of visitor groups used the shuttle bus service on the day they received their questionnaire. The most common reasons why visitor groups did not use the shuttle bus service on the day they received their questionnaire were that it was not convenient (33%) and shuttle did not stop at places visitor wanted to go (15%).
Traffic congestion in the park	Thirty percent of visitor groups felt that traffic congestion in parking areas at primary destinations was a big problem. Seventy percent of visitor groups felt that traffic congestion while driving on park roads was not a problem.
Information services and facilities	The information services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were the park brochure/map (75%), assistance from park staff (56%), and Paradise Visitor Center (55%).
Commercial services and facilities	The commercial services and facilities most commonly used by visitor groups were food service at Paradise Inn (33%), gift shops at Paradise Jackson Visitor Center (32%), and gift shops at Paradise Inn (30%).
Protecting park attributes, resources, and experiences	The highest combined proportions of “extremely important” and “very important” ratings of protecting park attributes, resources, and experiences included natural features (97%), clear water (94%), scenic views (93%), and clean air (93%).
Feeding wildlife	Thirteen percent of visitor groups observed wildlife begging for food. Seventy-six percent of visitor groups received/saw information about feeding wildlife. Seventy-seven percent of visitor groups were “very aware” of wildlife habituation issues before their visit, while 86% were “very aware” after their visit.
Expenditures	The average visitor group expenditure (inside and outside the park within 30 miles of the park) was \$255. The median group expenditure (50% of groups spent more and 50% of groups spent less) was \$70 and the average total expenditure per person (per capita) was \$88. Fourteen percent of respondents had forgone income (due to taking unpaid time off from work) to make this trip, of which 53% of respondents forwent \$201 or more.

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- Fees** Twenty-one percent of visitor groups felt a \$5 fee charged for day hiking and 17% of visitor groups felt a \$20 fee charged for backpacking/wilderness camping would prevent them participating in these activities. Fifty-three percent of visitor groups would support a \$5 increase in entrance fees to support park shuttle services. Sixty-seven percent of visitor groups would support an increase in entrance fees to offset decreases in park operating budgets.
- Limiting number of campfires** Forty percent of visitor groups would support limiting the number of campfires permitted within park campgrounds, while 38% would not.
- Overall quality** Most visitor groups (91%) rated the overall quality of facilities, services, and recreational opportunities at Mount Rainier NP as “very good” or “good.” One percent of visitor groups rated the overall quality as “very poor” or “poor.”

For more information about the Visitor Services Project, please contact the Park Studies Unit at the University of Idaho at (208) 885-2585 or the following website <http://www.psu.uidaho.edu>.